Uṣool at-Tafseer

The Methodology of Qur'anic Interpretation

أصول التفسير



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Bismi Allahi Alrrahmani Alrraheemi

In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful

INTRODUCTION

The title of this book, *Usool at-Tafseer* (lit. The Fundamental Principles of Qur'aanic Interpretation), essentially refers to the branches of knowledge which are necessary to provide an accurate interpretation of the Qur'aanic texts, such as Arabic grammar and syntax, Arabic literature and Qur'aanic sciences (*'uloom al-Qur'aan*). Familiarity with modern fields of learning, like the pure sciences and social sciences, is also necessary for a commentator in this era to make the Qur'aanic explanations relevant to modern human society. *Usool at-Tafseer* addresses the actual step-by-step methodology of interpreting the Qur'aan to ensure that interpretations are not merely the result of human whims and fancies. These subjects were traditionally mentioned in the books of *usool al-fiqh* (The Fundamental Principles of Islaamic Law) and the introductions to the classical books of *Tafseer*.

Among the most well known early works dedicated to the subject of *Usool at-Tafseer* is a treatise called *Muqaddimah fee Usool at-Tafseer,*[1] done by the outstanding scholar of the 13th century CE, Ibn Taymeeyah.[2] Of the latter day works, that of the Indian scholar, 'Abdul-Hameed al-Faraahee, is perhaps the most notable. He entitled his work, *at-Takmeel fee Usool at-Ta'weel.*[3]

The more commonly used term, *'uloom al-Qur'aan,* refers to all the fields of knowledge which serve to elucidate the Qur'aan or which are derived from it. Included among them are knowledge of *tafseer* (exegesis), *qiraa'aat* (recitations), *ar-rasmul-'Uthmaanee* (the 'Uthmaanic script), *i'jaaz al-Qur'aan* (miraculous aspects of the Qur'aan), *asbaab an-nuzool* (reasons for revelation), *an-naasikh wal-mansookh* (abrogating and abrogated verses), *i'raab al-Qur'aan* (Qur'aanic grammar), *ghareeb al-Qur'aan* (unusual Qur'aanic terms), religious rulings, and Arabic language and literature.[4]

During the era of book compilation, many books were written in the various areas of *'uloom al-Qur'aan.* Concern was first focused on the field of *tafseer,* since all the various Qur'aanic sciences are utilized in it. Among the early writers of the 8th century CE were Shu'bah ibn al-Hajjaaj, Sufyaan ibn 'Uyaynah and

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[1] It was translated by Dr. M. Abdul Haq Ansari for Imaam Ibn Sa'ood Islamic University in Riyadh and later reprinted in England by Al-Hidaayah Press under the title, *An Introduction to the Principles of Tafseer.*

[2] Born 661 AH/1262 CE; died 728 AH/1327 CE.

[3] *Lamahaat fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* pp. 191-2.

[4] *Manaahil al-'Irfaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* p. 16.

Wakee‘ ibn al-Jarraah. Their *tafseers* were collections of the opinions of the Prophet’s companions (*sahaabah*) and their students (*taabi‘oon*). They were followed by Ibn Jareer at-Tabaree (d. 310 AH), whose *Tafseer* is considered the greatest, as he was the first to analyze the opinions and choose the strongest; and he analyzed the grammatical constructions and deduced rulings from the verses. Concern for *tafseer* has continued until the present day, producing a large variety of methodologies for Qur’aanic elucidation.

As for the other areas of *‘uloom al-Qur’aan,* among the leading 9th century writers were ‘Alee ibn al-Madeenee (Imaam al-Bukhaaree’s teacher), who wrote on *Asbaab an-Nuzool,* and Aboo ‘Ubayd al-Qaasim ibn Salaam, who wrote on abrogation. The leading scholar of the 10th century to write on the unusual constructions of the Qur’aan was Aboo Bakr as-Sijistaanee, while the 11th century scholar, ‘Alee ibn Sa‘eed al-Hoofee, produced a work on its grammatical constructions in general. In the 12th century, the leading scholar to write on *Mubhamaat al-Qur’aan* (Qur’aanic Ambiguities) was Abul-Qaasim ‘Abdur-Rahmaan as-Sabeelee. He was followed by Ibn ‘Abdis-Salaam, who wrote on Qur’aanic metaphor (*majaaz al-Qur’aan*), and ‘Alamud-Deen as-Sakhaawee, who wrote on the recitations in the 13th century.[5]

The scholars who wrote during this period sought to comprehensively cover the topics they focused on. Consequently, those who wrote on *ghareeb al-Qur’aan,* for example, would mention every single word in the Qur’aan which was strange or of ambiguous meaning; and those who compiled works on metaphors would investigate every type of word or phrase in the Qur’aan which had allegorical meanings, and so on in the various branches of Qur’aanic fields of learning. The vastness of the works made it impossible for any single individual to master all fields, even if he spent his whole life and utilized all his energy. As a result, later scholars longed for the evolution of a new science which would act like an index or directory for all these fields. This became the field officially known as *‘uloom al-Qur’aan.* Although there is no record of any scholars writing or attempting to write a compilation of this type before the 10th century, it was collected in the intellects of the leading early scholars.

The biography of Imaam ash-Shaafi‘ee (d. 820 CE) contains an incident which amply illustrates this point. When he was accused of being the leader of the ‘Alawee sect in Yemen and was brought in shackles and chains before Caliph Haroon ar-Rasheed[6] in Baghdaad, the Caliph asked him about his knowledge of

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[5] *Manaahil al-‘Irfaan fee ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan,* pp. 24-25.
[6] Ruled 786-809 CE.

Allaah's scripture. Imaam ash-Shaafi'ee replied, "About which of Allaah's scriptures do you enquire, O Ameerul-Mu'mineen? For Allaah has revealed many scriptures." Ar-Rasheed replied, "Excellent answer. However, I am asking about the Book of Allaah which was revealed to my cousin Muhammad (ﷺ)." Imaam ash-Shaafi'ee said, "The fields of knowledge concerning the Qur'aan (*'uloom al-Qur'aan*) are many. Are you asking about the *muhkam* and the *mutashaabih,* or *taqdeem* (advancement) and *ta'kheer* (delay), or *naasikh* and *mansookh,* or about... or about...?" So ar-Rasheed raised questions about a number of different fields of Qur'aanic knowledge, and Imaam ash-Shaafi'ee's answers for each question astounded the Caliph and those present.[7]

The first specialized work on *'uloom al-Qur'aan* recorded in the index of authors, *Fihrist Ibn Nadeem,* is the 10th century work, *al-Haadee fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* by Aboo Bakr Muhammad ibn Khalaf (d. 309 AH). It was written in 47 volumes, however, no copies have reached us.[8] The next oldest is *al-Burhaan fee Tafseer al-Qur'aan*[9] by 'Alee ibn Ibraaheem ibn Sa'eed, better known as al-Hoofee (d. 330 AH). The original text was in 30 volumes, of which 15 are available in manuscript.[10] The text is not a systematic compilation of the sciences of *'uloom al-Qur'aan,* but follows the *tafseer* format in which the author introduces the various branches of *'uloom al-Qur'aan* where relevant.

In the 12th century, Ibn al-Jawzee (d. 597 AH) wrote two books in the field called *Funoon al-Afnaan fee 'Uyoon'Uloom al-Qur'aan* and *al-Mujtabaa fee 'Uloom Tata'allaq bil-Qur'aan.* The first has been printed. The second remains in manuscript at Daar al-Kutub al-Misreeyah in Egypt. The 13th century witnessed two more works, *Jamaal al-Qurraa'* by 'Alamud-Deen as-Sakhaawee (d. 641 AH), and *al-Murshid al-Wajeez fee maa Yata'allaq bil-Qur'aan al-'Azeez,*[11] by Aboo Shaamah 'Abdur-Rahmaan ibn Ismaa'eel al-Maqdasee (d. 775 AH). Badrud-Deen az-Zarkashee (d. 794 AH) wrote his classic, entitled *al-Burhaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* in the 14th century. It has been published.[12] He was followed in the 15th century by Muhammad ibn Sulaymaan al-Kaafeejee (d. 873 AH) and

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[7] *Manaahil al-'Irfaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* p. 25.
[8] *'Ulum al-Qur'an,* p. 6.
[9] Shaykh az-Zarqaanee mistakenly entitled it, *al-Burhaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* in his book *Manaahil al-'Irfaan,* vol. 1, p. 27-8. See the encyclopedic index of authors and their works, *Kashf ath-Thunoon,* vol. 1, p. 242, for reference to the correct title of al-Hoofee's work.
[10] It is available in Daar al-Kutub al-Misreeyah, Egypt.
[11] Edited by Tayyaar Qoolaaj and published in Beirut by Daar Saadir, 1975.
[12] Edited by Muhammad Abul-Fadl Ibraaheem, published in Egypt by Ibraaheem 'Eesaa al-Baabee al-Halabee Press, 2nd edition in 1972 (1391 AH).

Jalaalud-Deen al-Balqeenee, who identified fifty different types of Qur'aanic sciences in his book, *Mawaaqi' al-'Uloom min Mawaaqi' an-Nujoom*. In the same century, Jalaalud-Deen as-Suyootee (d. 911 AH) wrote two books in the field of *'uloom al-Qur'aan*. He entitled the first, finished in 872 AH, *at-Tahbeer fee 'Uloom at-Tafseer*. It consists of one slim volume, but touches on 102 different fields of Qur'aanic sciences. He later combined and condensed the fields to 80, which he then elaborated upon in his work, *Kitaab al-Itqaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan.*[13] The latter text became the standard source book in the study of *'uloom al-Qur'aan* for later generations of scholars.

For the next three centuries the field of *'uloom al-Qur'aan* saw little development. However in the 20th century, a new flurry of writing began with Shaykh Taahir al-Jazaa'iree's 300-page work entitled, *at-Tibyaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan.*[14] In the mid twentieth century, a number of professors at al-Azhar University wrote concise texts on the subject of *'uloom al-Qur'aan* for their respective colleges. Some of these were later published. Among the more notable is *Minhaaj al-Furqaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*[15] written for students in the College of *Da'wah wal-Irshaad* by Shaykh Muhammad 'Alee Salaamah.[16] *Manaahil al-'Irfaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,*[17] a two volume work of over 1000 pages was written by Shaykh Muhammad 'Abdul-'Atheem az-Zarqaanee, former lecturer of *'uloom al-Qur'aan* and *'uloom al-Hadeeth* in the College of Islaamic Disciplines (*usool ad-Deen*). In the latter part of the 20th century, a number of excellent works have been written in the field by university professors like *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan* by Subhee as-Saalih, *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan* by Mannaa' al-Qattaan, *Madkhal ilaa al-Qur'aan al-Kareem*[18] by Muhammad 'Abdullaah Daraaz, *al-Madkhal li Diraasah al-Qur'aan,*[19] by Muhammad Aboo Shahbah, and *Lamahaat fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*[20] by Dr. Muhammad ibn Lutfee as-Sabbaagh.

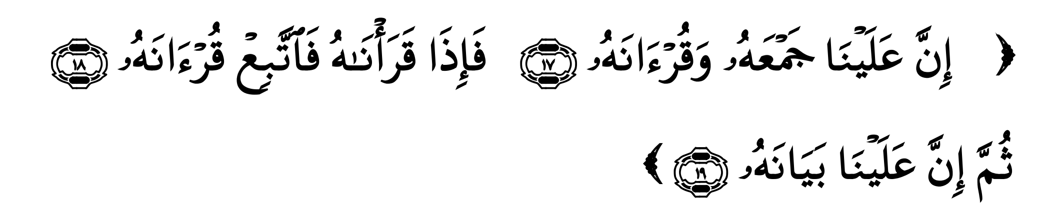
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[13] *Manaahil al-'Irfaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* pp. 27-30.
[14] Published in Egypt by al-Manaar Press in 1915 (1334 AH) under the title, *at-Tibyaan li ba'd al-Mabaahith al-Muta'allaqah bil-Qur'aan.*
[15] Published under the title, *Jawaahir al-Bayaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan.*
[16] *Manaahil al-'Irfaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* p. 31.
[17] Published in Egypt by Daar Ihyaa al-Kutub al-'Arabeeyah, 3rd ed., 1953.
[18] Published in Beirut by Daar al-Qalam Press, 1971.
[19] Published in Egypt in 1973.
[20] Published in Beirut by al-Maktab al-Islaamee, 3rd ed., 1990.

1

TAFSEER OF THE QUR'AAN

The Qur'aan, God's final book of revelation to man, represents the primary source of the principles which constitute the way of life known as Islaam. The passages of the Qur'aan contain advice and guidance in the form of laws, parables, stories, and arguments for those who choose to believe in God and the Day of Judgment. Hence, a believer's success and happiness in this life and the next largely depend on his understanding, internalization, and application of the concepts contained in the Book. However, the depth of comprehension of the Qur'aan's meanings will vary from individual to individual due to natural differences in intelligence. This variation existed even among the *sahaabah* (companions of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), in spite of the Qur'aan's clarity of expression and its revelation in seven different dialects. Moreover, Allaah, the Most Wise, chose to place generalities in the Qur'aan, some of which He later explained in its other verses, while some he explained only to the Prophet (ﷺ). The Prophet (ﷺ) knew and understood the Qur'aan completely because Allaah had chosen him as its vehicle and explained it all to him. Hence, Allaah said in one verse:



“Verily, collecting the Qur’aan (for you) and reciting it (to you) is My[21] responsibility, so when I read it to you, listen to it. Then it is upon Me to explain it.”[22]

Therefore, it was the Prophet’s job to explain the Qur’aan to his followers by his actions, as well as his statements. Allaah stated this in the Qur’aan:

﴿ وَأَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكَ ٱلذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ ﴾

“I have revealed the Reminder (Qur’aan) to you (O Mu<u>h</u>ammad) so that you may explain to people what has been revealed to them.”[23]

Consequently, the *<u>s</u>a<u>h</u>aabah* all turned to the Prophet (ﷺ) whenever possible during his lifetime for the *tafseer* (explanation, understanding, interpretation) of the Qur’aan. For example, Ibn Mas‘ood related that when the following verse was revealed:

﴿ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوٓا۟ إِيمَٰنَهُم بِظُلْمٍ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمُ ٱلْأَمْنُ وَهُم مُّهْتَدُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾ ﴾

“Those who believe and do not obscure their faith with transgression (*<u>th</u>ulm*), for them there is security, and they are rightly guided,”[24]

some of the companions became distressed, because the general linguistic meaning of *<u>th</u>ulm* covers any kind of wrong, major or minor, and none of them

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[21] Literally, ‘Our.’ The ‘royal We’ is barely used in English, but it is a common feature of Arabic speech, used to indicate the importance of the speaker. It is my standard practice to translate this ‘We’ as ‘I,’ since the literal translation is a frequent cause of confusion for English speakers.

[22] *Soorah al-Qiyaamah* (75):17-9.

[23] *Soorah an-Na<u>h</u>l* (16):44.

[24] *Soorah al-An‘aam* (6):82.

were free from error. However, when they approached the Prophet (ﷺ) about it, he replied,

(لَيْسَ هُوَ كَمَا تَظُنُّونَ إِنَّمَا هُوَ كَمَا قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لاِبْنِهِ { يَا بُنَيَّ لاَ تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ })

"It is not as you all think. It is no more than what Luqmaan said to his son, ***'Verily,* shirk *(associating partners with God) is the greatest form of* thulm.'**[25]"[26]

Thus the Prophet (ﷺ) clarified for them that the broader meaning of *thulm* was not intended in the first verse; rather it was used to refer to *shirk*.

In this incident, the Prophet (ﷺ) explained the Qur'aan by the Qur'aan, demonstrating the first step in the divinely ordained method of understanding and interpretation of the Qur'aan that was established for all generations of Muslims until the Day of Resurrection. After the Prophet's death, the *sahaabah* turned to those among themselves who were more gifted in understanding the Qur'aan and who had been able to spend more time with the Prophet (ﷺ) for interpretation and explanation of the Qur'aan.

Among the *sahaabah* who became the most noted for their ability to make *tafseer* of the Qur'aan are the following: The four Righteous Caliphs,[27] the Prophet's wife, 'Aa'ishah bint Abee Bakr, Ibn Mas'ood, Ibn 'Abbaas, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Zayd ibn Thaabit, Aboo Moosaa al-Ash'aree, 'Abdullaah ibn az-Zubayr, Anas ibn Maalik, 'Abdullaah ibn 'Umar, Jaabir ibn 'Abdullaah, and 'Abdullaah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Aas.[28] Within the space of twenty-five years after the Prophet's death, the *sahaabah* carried Islaam to all corners of the known world, toppling in the process the great empires of Persia and Byzantine. Wherever the Muslim armies stopped their advance, some of the *sahaabah* would settle and begin teaching those who came into Islaam the recitation and interpretation of the Qur'aan. For this reason, the knowledge of *tafseer* spread throughout the Muslim realm, and centers of Qur'aanic learning sprung up everywhere. Among the people who gathered around the *sahaabah* were some outstanding individuals who remained their students and absorbed their knowledge. These students became known as *taabi'oon*. Each *sahaabee* carried with him a portion of

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[25] *Soorah Luqmaan* (31):13.
[26] *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 72, no. 226.
[27] Aboo Bakr as-Siddeeq, 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab, 'Uthmaan ibn 'Affaan, and 'Alee ibn Abee Taalib.
[28] *Al-Itqaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* vol. 2, p. 239.

knowledge, some of which overlapped with that of others and some of which did not. Consequently, some of the students traveled to other Islaamic centers to study under other *sahaabah,* while others stayed with their teachers until their deaths.

Schools of *Tafseer*

The most notable centers of *tafseer* which evolved during this period were those of Makkah, Madeenah, and ‘Iraaq. In Makkah, the *tafseer* school of Ibn ‘Abbaas became the most prominent. ‘Abdullaah ibn ‘Abbaas was considered to be the greatest *tafseer* scholar among the *sahaabah.* He reported that once the Prophet (ﷺ) hugged him and prayed for him as follows,

(اللَّهُمَّ فَقِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ وَعَلِّمْهُ التَّأْوِيلَ .)

“*O Allaah, give him a deep understanding of the religion and make him skilled in interpretation.*”[29]

‘Abdullaah ibn Mas‘ood, the great scholar among the *sahaabah,* was reported to have conferred on him the title, “*Tarjumaan al-Qur’aan,*”[30] “Translator of the Qur’aan.” The most famous students of Ibn ‘Abbaas were Mujaahid ibn Jabr, ‘Ikrimah (the freed slave of Ibn ‘Abbaas), Sa‘eed ibn Jubayr, Taawoos ibn Keesaan al-Yamaanee, and ‘Ataa ibn Abee Rabaah.[31]

In Madeenah, the most noted school of *tafseer* was that of Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, who was considered by most of his contemporaries as the top reciter of the Qur’aan. Ubayy was also the first person chosen by the Prophet (ﷺ) to record the revelation of the Qur’aan.[32] The Prophet (ﷺ) was reported to have said to him,

(إِنَّ اللَّهَ أَمَرَنِي أَنْ أَقْرَأَ عَلَيْكَ { لَمْ يَكُنِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ })

“*Verily, Allaah, the Most Great and Glorious, has commanded me to recite to you,* ***‘Lam yakunillatheena kafaroo.’ (Soorah al-Bayyinah)****.*” When Ubayy

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[29] Collected by Ahmad (*al-Musnad*, no. 2274). A version mentioning only the first half of the Prophet’s supplication on his behalf is reported in *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, p. 106, no. 145, and *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, pp. 1320-1, no. 6055.

[30] Collected by al-Haakim and by Ibn Sa‘d in *at-Tabaqaat*. See *Siyar al-A‘laam an-Nubalaa’*, vol. 3, p. 347.

[31] *Al-Itqaan fee ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan*, vol. 2, p. 242. It is interesting to note that all of these great scholars were former slaves.

[32] According to al-Waaqidee. Quoted in *Al-Isaabah fee Tamyeez as-Sahaabah*. Perhaps he meant in Madeenah.

asked if Allaah had mentioned him by name, the Prophet (ﷺ) told him yes, and Ubayy cried.[33] Ubayy's most notable students were Zayd ibn Aslam, Aboo al 'Aaliyah, and Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Qura<u>th</u>ee.[34]

In 'Iraaq, Ibn Mas'ood headed the most prominent school of *tafseer*. 'Abdullaah ibn Mas'ood, the sixth person to enter Islaam,[35] was among the top reciters of the Qur'aan. The Prophet (ﷺ) himself praised his recitation saying,

(مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يَقْرَأَ الْقُرْآنَ غَضًّا كَمَا أُنْزِلَ فَلْيَقْرَأْهُ عَلَى قِرَاءَةِ ابْنِ أُمِّ عَبْدٍ .)

"*Whoever wishes to recite the Qur'aan in the tender manner in which it was revealed should recite it as Ibn Umm 'Abd (Ibn Mas'ood) does.*"[36] As for his knowledge of *tafseer*, Ibn Mas'ood said, "By the One besides Whom there is no other god, I know where and why every verse of Allaah's book was revealed."[37]

Among the many students of Ibn Mas'ood who later became scholars in their own right were al-<u>H</u>asan al-Basree, 'Alqamah ibn Qays, Masrooq, al-A<u>s</u>wad ibn Yazeed, and 'Aamir ash-Sha'bee.[38]

Transmission of *Tafseer*

During this period, *tafseer* was taught by narration. That is, the *<u>s</u>a<u>h</u>aabah* who headed schools of *tafseer* would quote the sayings of the Prophet (ﷺ) which explained the meanings of verses, or explain the historical context in which the verses were revealed, or they would quote verses of pre-Islaamic poetry which explained the meaning of some words that were no longer in common use. After the era of the *<u>s</u>a<u>h</u>aabah,* their students, the *taabi'oon,* continued to teach by narration in much the same way that they had learned. However, some of them also began narrating along with their *tafseers* tales from Jewish and Christian sources to further explain certain passages of the Qur'aan.

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[33] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 5, p. 97, no. 154) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p.1313, no. 6031).
[34] *Mabaa<u>h</u>ith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, p.339.
[35] *<u>S</u>ifah a<u>s</u>-<u>S</u>afwah,* vol.1, p. 395.
[36] Reported by 'Umar, Ibn Mas'ood and other *<u>s</u>a<u>h</u>aabah* and collected by A<u>h</u>mad, Ibn Maajah (vol. 1, p. 77, no. 138), al-<u>H</u>aakim and others. Authenticated by al-Albaanee in *<u>S</u>a<u>h</u>ee<u>h</u> al-Jaami' a<u>s</u>-<u>S</u>agheer*, vol. 2, p. 1034.
[37] *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1312, no. 6023.
[38] *Mabaa<u>h</u>ith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, p. 339.

It should be noted that some compilation of *tafseer* took place during the era of the *taabi'oon.* The most noteworthy example is that of Mujaahid ibn Jabr (642-722 CE/40-103 AH), a student of Ibn 'Abbaas. Mujaahid compiled the earliest known *tafseer*; however, no copy of his work has reached us. The significance of Mujaahid's *tafseer* can be appreciated from his following statement, "I read the whole Qur'aan to Ibn 'Abbaas three times. During each reading, I stopped at the end of every verse and asked him about whom and why it was revealed."[39]

Towards the end of the Umayyad dynasty,[40] the systematic compilation of *tafseer* began. The scholars of *hadeeth* began compiling the sayings and actions of the Prophet (ﷺ) in chapters according to their subject matter, and the chapter on *tafseer* was one of them. Some of these scholars paid special attention to the narration of *tafseer* attributed to the Prophet (ﷺ), the *sahaabah* and the *taabi'oon.* The foremost among them were Yazeed ibn Haaroon as-Salamee (d. 737 CE/118 AH), Shu'bah ibn al-Hajjaaj (d. 777 CE/160 AH), Sufyaan ibn 'Uyaynah (d. 814 CE/198AH), 'Abdur-Razzaaq ibn Hammaam (d. 827 CE/211 AH), and 'Abd ibn Humayd (d. 864 CE/250 AH).[41] However, no *tafseer* of the complete Qur'aan took place at this time.[42]

Near the end of the ninth century CE, the field of *tafseer* evolved into an independent Islaamic science. This generation of scholars was the first to compile *tafseers* of the Qur'aan according to the order of the written text. The earliest *tafseer* to reach us was authored by Ibn Jareer at-Tabaree (839-923 CE/225-310 AH), who comes from this era. Other *tafseers* were written by Ibn Maajah (d. 886 CE/272 AH), Ibn Abee Haatim (d. 939 CE/327 AH), Ibn Hibbaan (d. 980 CE/369 AH), al-Haakim (d. 1014 CE/404 AH), and Ibn Mardawayh (d. 1020 CE/410 AH).[43] All of these scholars were also famous for compilations of *hadeeth,* most of which have reached us intact. Occasionally, *tafseers* were attributed to scholars of the previous generation, known as *atbaa' at-taabi'een* (the students of the *taabi'oon*). These *tafseers* also mentioned the legal rulings deduced from the verses and the breakdown of grammatical constructions where necessary.

Although the next generation of scholars followed the same general format as their predecessors, many of them deleted the chains of narration from their

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[39] Collected by Ibn Nu'aym in *Hilyah al-Awliyaa'* and by Ibn 'Asaakir. See *Siyar al-A'laam an-Nubalaa'*, vol. 4, p. 450.
[40] The Umayyads were overthrown in 132 AH (750 CE).
[41] The most accessible *hadeeth* collection on *tafseer* for the English-speaking reader is volume six of *Sahih Al-Bukhari.*
[42] *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, pp.340-1.
[43] Ibid., p.341.

tafseers, leaving only the names of the *sahaabah* or *taabi'oon* and their interpretations; for example, *Bahr al-'Uloom* by Aboo al-Layth as-Samarqandee (d. 983 CE/372 AH). Great stress was placed on literary forms and grammatical constructions in many of these *tafseers*. The various forms of recitation, without their chains of narration, were also recorded and used as explanations of the text. However, they also included in their *tafseers* a vast number of anonymous statements and opinions without any mention of who made them. Consequently, many of these *tafseers* are confusing. Accurate accounts and interpretations were mixed with inaccurate ones without any distinction between them.

In addition, the door of *tafseer* according to personal opinion was opened. Works of *tafseer* soon began to reflect various trends of thought in Muslim society. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the major works of Greek philosophy and science that had been translated in the previous centuries began to have an effect on all of the various Islaamic fields of study. Philosophical schools of thought like that of the Mu'tazilees (Rationalists) had evolved which boldly threatened pure Islaamic thought. *Tafseers* full of philosophical and scientific terminology, like *al-Kash-shaaf* of az-Zamakhsharee (1075-1144 CE/467-538 AH) or *Mafaateeh al-Ghayb* of Fakhrud-Deen ar-Raazee (1149-1210 CE/544-606 AH), and *tafseers* expressing the thoughts of various heretical sects also appeared during this period. For example, the Twelver Shee'ah *tafseer* of Mullah Muhsin al-Kaash made the verses of the Qur'aan speak of twelve infallible *imaams,* the imaginary *walaayah* (governorship) of the Prophet's son-in-law 'Alee and the claimed apostasy of all of the Prophet's companions except a handful; and the *Soofee tafseer* of Ibn al-'Arabee (d. 1240 CE/638 AH) made Qur'aanic verses voice his pantheistic ideology of Allaah being all and all being Allaah.[44]

There was also a trend towards specialization among the Islaamic scholars, resulting from the evolution of Islaamic learning into a multiplicity of disciplines. Consequently, *tafseers* like those of al-Jassaas (917-980 CE/304-369 AH) and al-Qurtubee (d. 1273 CE/671 AH) concentrated on the deduction of *fiqh* (Islaamic law) from the Qur'aanic passages according to their respective *math-habs* (schools of *fiqh*). Likewise, ath-Tha'labee, who specialized in tales of ancient

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[44] Muhammad ibn 'Alee ibn Muhammad ibn al-'Arabee was from Andalus (Spain), but he travelled extensively and died in 'Iraaq. A prolific writer, he authored some 300 books, the most famous being *al-Futoohaat al-Makkeeyah* and *Fusoos al-Hikam*. He wrote nine different *tafseers* of the Qur'aan, among them *Tarjumaan al-Ashwaaq*, for which he wrote a number of commentaries.

history, authored *al-Jawaahir al-Hisaan fee Tafseer al-Qur'aan,* in which he gathered all of the narrations about the ancients, regardless of their authenticity.[45]

Tafseers of this era and subsequent generations contained a mixture of truth and falsehood, some valuable material and much that was worthless. Eventually, *tafseer* based on personal opinions completely superseded *tafseer* based on authentic narration. The authors of these *tafseers* stretched the meanings of the verses to affirm the thoughts and ideas of their respective sects or schools and rebut those of others. Thus, the primary role of *tafseer,* that of explaining religious instruction contained in the verses, was lost. The *tafseer* scholar Jalaalud-Deen as-Suyootee (d. 1505 CE/910 AH) noted the following:

> I have seen approximately ten different opinions concerning the *tafseer* of the verse:
>
> ﴿ صِرَٰطَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ غَيۡرِ ٱلۡمَغۡضُوبِ عَلَيۡهِمۡ وَلَا ٱلضَّآلِّينَ ٧ ﴾
>
> **"Not the path of those on whom is [Your] anger nor those who have gone astray,"**[46]
>
> in spite of the fact that the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions *(sahaabah)* and their students *(taabi'oon)* all related that the verse referred to none other than the Jews and the Christians. And (one of the early scholars) Ibn Abee Haatim said concerning this verse, "I know of no disagreement among the scholars of *tafseer* about it."[47]

Some of the scholars of this and later periods confined themselves to making abridgements of earlier works while others were satisfied to write footnotes for earlier works. It should also be noted that in spite of the deviation and stagnation which afflicted the field of *tafseer,* as well as all of the Islaamic sciences, there were a number of great scholars who held high the banner of pure Islaamic

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[45] *At-Tafseer wa al-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 145-8.

[46] *Soorah al-Faatihah* (1):7.

[47] Quoted in *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* p. 345.

thought. Thus, it should not be surprising to find that the most highly acclaimed *tafseer* of all times was produced by a scholar of this time, *Tafseer al-Qur'aan al-'Atheem* by al-Haafith ibn Katheer (d. 1373 CE/774 AH).

In this century, a new form of *tafseer* has evolved in which the authors have tried to apply the passages of the Qur'aan to the needs of the twentieth century. For example, *tafseers* like *Tafseer al-Manaar*, started by Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905 CE) and completed up to *Soorah Yoosuf* by his student Muhammad Rasheed Ridaa,[48] or *Fee Thilaal al-Qur'aan* by Syed Qutb point out the Qur'aanic foundations for human society, legislation, and scientific theories.

Both these *tafseers* have their critics. 'Abduh was interested in reforming Muslim societies to meet the challenge of the west, and he called for the abandonment of *taqleed* as the starting point for that reform. He stressed the need for approaching the Qur'aan fresh, unencumbered by past inter-pretations of it. Neither he nor Ridaa would look at anyone else's *tafseer* until they had finished writing their own *tafseers* of a particular passage.[49] In his zeal to accommodate scientific theories, 'Abduh interpreted angels as being synonymous with natural forces, which led him to a symbolic interpretation of the story of Aadam and Iblees.[50] His student denied that the Prophet (ﷺ) performed any miracles other than conveying the Qur'aan. Both he and his student rejected a number of *hadeeths* reported by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim, claiming that they were weak.[51] Ridaa was, however, more learned in *hadeeth* than 'Abduh and relied on *hadeeths* more than him.[52] Both of them gave their intellects great freedom to interpret as they saw fit.

Syed Qutb lived at a time when the Islaamic caliphate had just been abolished. The Islaamic world had been divided into small countries with legal systems that were the product of European colonialism. He felt a deep outrage at Islaamic societies' abandonment of the *Sharee'ah* in ruling their affairs. His interpretations of the meaning of *tawheed* focused on Allaah's sole right to formulate the laws for the rule of human society. His stress of this point led to the

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[48] Muhammad Rasheed (dtook notes from 'Abduh's *tafseer* lectures, then wrote them up in his own words, and published them with his approval in his magazine *al-Manaar*. 'Abduh died after having completed from *Soorah al-Faatihah* until verse 126 of *Soorah an-Nisaa'*, then his student continued until his own death in 1935. (*Lamahaat fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, p. 321.)

[49] *Lamahaat fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, p. 322, and *at-Tafseer wa al-Mufassiroon*, vol. 2, 598-9.

[50] *Tafseer al-Manaar*, vol. 1, p. 167, quoted in *at-Tafseer wa al-Mufassiroon*, vol. 2, p. 611.

[51] *At-Tafseer wa al-Mufassiroon*, vol. 2, pp. 615-7, 628.

[52] *Lamahaat fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, pp. 321-2.

neglect of other aspects of *tawheed* and of the dangers posed by forms of *shirk* other than *shirk* in legislation. He seems to have actually been confused about the difference between *tawheed al-ulooheeyah* and *tawheed ar-ruboobeeyah.*[53] His critics also say that he laid the seeds for today's modern *takfeer* movements with his blanket condemnation of contemporary Islaamic societies as having nothing to do with Islaam, and with his praise of revolutionary movements in Islaamic history.[54] Despite these shortcomings, he presented a vigorous Islaamic critique of the flaws of secularism and the European civilization that spawned it at a time when most Muslims were apologetic about Islaam.

Tafseer and *Ta'weel*

The words *tafseer* and *ta'weel* were considered synonyms by the early generations of Muslims; however, in the centuries following the era of the *taabi'oon* and their students (9th and 10th centuries CE/3rd and 4th centuries AH), the term *ta'weel* took on a new meaning with new and dangerous implications. Consequently, it is necessary for us to look at these terms in their original context, as well as their later usage.

The word *tafseer,* which comes from the verb *fassara,* literally means an explanation or an exposition, as in the verse,

﴿ وَلَا يَأْتُونَكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلَّا جِئْنَـٰكَ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَأَحْسَنَ تَفْسِيرًا ﴾ ٣٣

"For any parable they bring, I will bring you the truth and a better explanation (*tafseeran*)."[55]

However, in Qur'aanic sciences, this term is defined as a branch of knowledge by which the Qur'aan is understood, its meanings explained, and its points of law and wisdom derived.[56]

On the other hand, the word *ta'weel,* which comes from the verb *awwala,* literally means interpretation. When the word *ta'weel* is used in the context of a command, it means its execution or implementation, as in the *hadeeth* reported by 'Aa'ishah in which she said, "Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) used to implement

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[53] See *Fee Thilaal al Qur'aan,* vol. 4, pp. 1846 and 1852.
[54] See *Adwaa'un Islaameeyah 'alaa 'Aqeedah Syed Qutb wa Fikrih*, pp. 43-5, 60-104.
[55] *Soorah al-Furqaan* (25):33.
[56] *Al-Itqaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, vol. 2, p. 174.

(*yata'awwal*) the Qur'aan by saying in *rukoo'* (bowing) and *sujood* (prostration) [during *s̲alaah*],

(سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ رَبَّنَا وَبِحَمْدِكَ اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِي .)

'Glory be to You, O Allaah, our Lord, and Praised are You. O Allaah, forgive me'."[57]

She was referring to the Prophet's execution of Allaah's command in the verse,

﴿ فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَٱسْتَغْفِرْهُ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ تَوَّابًۢا ﴿٣﴾ ﴾

"Glorify Your Lord and ask His forgiveness, for verily, He is Oft-Forgiving." [58]

When *ta'weel* is used in reference to news or information, it refers to its occurrence, as in the verse,

﴿ وَلَقَدْ جِئْنَٰهُم بِكِتَٰبٍ فَصَّلْنَٰهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾ هَلْ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَّا تَأْوِيلَهُۥ ۚ ﴾

"Verily, I have brought them a book of knowledge—and explained it in detail—a guide and a mercy for the Believers. Are they only waiting for the occurrence (*ta'weelahu*) (of what is in the Book)?"[59]

That is, Allaah ridicules those who do not accept revelation by asking them if they are foolishly awaiting the occurrence of the final hour and its signs, the Judgment, Paradise, and the Hellfire, when it will be too late.

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[57] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, p. 434, no. 781) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 255-6, no. 981).
[58] *Soorah an-Nas̲r* (110):3.
[59] *Soorah al-A'raaf* (7):52-3.

However, when the word *ta'weel* is used in reference to recorded speech, it refers to its explanation or interpretation, as in the verse:

﴿ هُوَ ٱلَّذِيٓ أَنزَلَ عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِنۡهُ ءَايَٰتٞ مُّحۡكَمَٰتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ
ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَٰبِهَٰتٞۖ فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمۡ زَيۡغٞ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا
تَشَٰبَهَ مِنۡهُ ٱبۡتِغَآءَ ٱلۡفِتۡنَةِ وَٱبۡتِغَآءَ تَأۡوِيلِهِۦۗ ﴾

"It is He who revealed the Book to you. In it are clear verses which are the essence of the Book and others which are obscure. As for those whose hearts are twisted, they follow what is obscure seeking to sow discord and searching for its interpretation (*ta'weelahu*)."[60]

Hence, the early scholars of *tafseer* used the words *tafseer* and *ta'weel* interchangeably. For example, Ibn Jareer at-Tabaree, in his *tafseer*, commonly introduced each section with the phrase, "The opinion concerning the *ta'weel* (explanation) of the statement of the Exalted."[61]

In later centuries, when deviant and heretical explanations abounded, the term *ta'weel* was used by the scholars of that time to justify them and give them an air of legitimacy. They defined *ta'weel* as the shifting of an expression from its obvious meaning to one of its likely meanings due to its context;[62] that is, the interpretation of a passage by other than its obvious meaning for whatever reason a scholar considered relevant. For example, scholars of this period under Mu'tazilee (Rationalist) influence explained away the word 'hand' in the following verse, which refers to an oath taken by the *sahaabah:*

[60] *Soorah Aal 'Imraan* (3):7.
[61] *Lamahaat fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, pp.123-4.
[62] *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, p. 326.

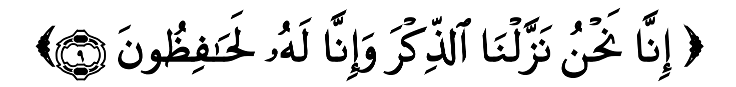
﴿ يَدُ ٱللَّهِ فَوۡقَ أَيۡدِيهِمۡۚ ﴾

"Allaah's hand is above their hands."[63]

They interpreted it as being Allaah's help and support for the simple reason that, as they put it, Allaah could not possibly have a hand. This '*ta'weel*' was based on the false premise that the attribution of a hand to Allaah automatically implied concep-tualizing Him in human form. However, in the same way that referring to Allaah as a living being (*al-Hayy*) does not in any way make Him humanlike, because His life is in no way like our life, referring to Allaah's hand as a real hand does not make Him humanlike, for his hand is in no way like our hands. It should be noted, however, that the affirmation by *Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jamaa'ah* that Allaah has a real hand does not mean that they understand His hand to be a body part.[64]

The Method of *Tafseer*

The Qur'aan is the last book of divine revelation sent to man, and Allaah has promised to protect it from any distortion or loss. He said in the Qur'aan:



"Verily, I have revealed the Reminder (Qur'aan) and verily I will preserve it."[65]

Its written and recited forms have been preserved without even the slightest change for over fourteen hundred years, as has been mentioned in previous

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[63] *Soorah al-Fat-h* (48):10.

[64] See *Sharh al'Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah,* by Abul-'Izz al-Hanafee, p. 220: "However, it may not be said about these attributes [i.e., the hands, eyes and face of Allaah] that they are organs, limbs, instruments or essential components, because Allaah is the Unique, the One Who needs no one but is needed by all. He can not be conceived of as being composed of components, whereas 'limbs' and 'organs' carry the connotation of divisibility."

[65] *Soorah al-Hijr* (15):9.

chapters. This cannot be said about the Gospel of Prophet Jesus (ﷺ), nor the books of the Old Testament attributed to earlier prophets, nor any other scripture revealed by Allaah. However, Allaah's protection of the Qur'aan did not stop there; He also safeguarded the original meaning. If the protection of the Qur'aan's meaning had not taken place, deviants would have turned the Book of Allaah into a jumble of symbols, riddles and codes open to a multiplicity of interpretations, and its original meaning would have been lost. Allaah preserved the meaning of the Qur'aan by explaining some of its generalities within the Qur'aan itself and by entrusting the *tafseer* of the remainder to His Messenger, Muhammad ibn Abdillaah (ﷺ) (570-632 CE).

The *sahaabah* (companions) were taught to seek their understanding of the Qur'aan first from the Qur'aan itself, then from the explanations and applications of the Prophet (ﷺ) and from their own intimate understanding of the language of the Qur'aan. After the Prophet's death, those who entered Islaam as new converts depended first upon the Qur'aan to explain itself, then they depended on the *sahaabah* to explain the Qur'aan to them. The *sahaabah* would inform their students among the *taabi'oon* of the circumstances in which the verses were revealed, the interpretation given by the Prophet's statements and his actions, and finally they would explain the meanings of some words which may not have been familiar or which may have had a different meaning to Arabs outside of the Arabian Peninsula. With the passing of the era of the *sahaabah*, the scholars among the *taabi'oon* shouldered the grave respon-sibility of conveying the original meanings of the Qur'aan to the next generation of Muslims exactly as they had received them. It was the third generation after the Prophet (ﷺ) which began the process of gathering and recording the various narrations of *tafseer* from the *taabi'oon.*

From the above-mentioned methodology of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions and that of the early generations of Muslim scholars which followed them, the following steps have been deduced by orthodox scholars as being the necessary conditions for making correct *tafseer* of the Qur'aan:

1. *Tafseer* of Qur'aan by Qur'aan

There are many places in the Qur'aan where questions are asked in order to catch the mind of the reader and subsequently answered to increase the impact of the concept in question. In other places, general statements are made and then later explained in order to vary the modes of presentation and encourage readers and listeners to reflect more. This self-explanatory process is referred to as *tafseer*

of the Qur'aan by Qur'aan. Allaah chose to clarify what He intended by revealing other explanatory verses. For example, Allaah asks,

﴿ وَٱلسَّمَآءِ وَٱلطَّارِقِ ۝١ وَمَآ أَدۡرَىٰكَ مَا ٱلطَّارِقُ ۝٢ ﴾

"By the heaven, and by *at-Taariq* (the Knocker or Night Approacher)—and what will make you understand what *at-Taariq* is?"

He then answers His question in the next verse:

﴿ ٱلنَّجۡمُ ٱلثَّاقِبُ ۝٣ ﴾

"It is the piercing star."[66]

Allaah also states in the Qur'aan:

﴿ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَوۡفُواْ بِٱلۡعُقُودِۚ أُحِلَّتۡ لَكُم بَهِيمَةُ ٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ إِلَّا مَا يُتۡلَىٰ عَلَيۡكُمۡ ﴾

"O you who believe...beasts which are herded have been made *halaal* for you except what will be recited to you."[67]

Two verses later He details the exceptions to the general rule:

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[66] *Soorah at-Taariq* (86):1-3.
[67] *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):1.

﴿ حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْمَيْتَةُ وَٱلدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ ٱلْخِنزِيرِ وَمَآ أُهِلَّ لِغَيْرِ ٱللَّهِ بِهِۦ
وَٱلْمُنْخَنِقَةُ وَٱلْمَوْقُوذَةُ وَٱلْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ وَٱلنَّطِيحَةُ وَمَآ أَكَلَ ٱلسَّبُعُ ﴾

"Animals that died without being slaughtered, blood, pork, animals sacrificed for other than Allaah, animals strangled to death, killed by a blow or by falling from a height, killed by goring, or partially eaten by wild animals are forbidden to you."[68]

Another example can be seen in the verse in which Allaah describes Himself, saying:

﴿ لَّا تُدْرِكُهُ ٱلْأَبْصَٰرُ ﴾

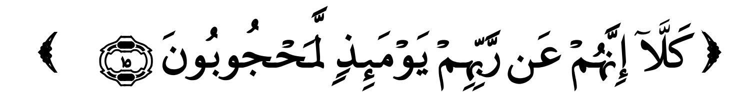
"Sight cannot encompass Him."[69]

This verse implies that Allaah will not be seen in either this world or the next. However, Allaah later describes the believers in the next life as:

﴿ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ ﴿٢٣﴾ ﴾

"Gazing at their Lord,"[70]

and he says about the disbelievers:



[68] *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):3.
[69] *Soorah al-An'aam* (6):103.
[70] *Soorah al-Qiyaamah* (75):23.

“Verily, they will be veiled from their Lord on that day.”[71]

Therefore, before seeking an explanation or interpretation elsewhere, the Qur’aan must be relied upon to explain itself, for Allaah knows best what He intended.

2. *Tafseer* of Qur’aan by the *Sunnah*

On many occasions, the Prophet (ﷺ) added further clarification to various verses of the Qur’aan. Allaah had entrusted the job of explaining the Qur’aan to the Prophet (ﷺ). This trust was expressed in the Qur’aan in no uncertain terms,

﴿ وَأَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكَ ٱلذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ ﴾

“I have revealed the Reminder (Qur’aan) to you (O Muhammad) so that you may explain to the people what has been revealed to them.”[72]

﴿ وَمَآ أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ إِلَّا لِتُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ ٱلَّذِى ٱخْتَلَفُوا۟ فِيهِ ﴾

“I have only revealed the Book to you (O Muhammad) in order that you clarify for them the things about which they differ.”[73]

The *sahaabah* understood this clearly and always turned to the Prophet (ﷺ) for clarification whenever they were in doubt about the meaning of any of the Qur’aanic passages. In fact, most of the fine details of *salaah, zakaah, sawm, hajj,* inheritance laws, etc. were explained either by the Prophet’s statements or practical demonstrations and applications (the *Sunnah*). Thus, the Prophet’s explanations of Qur’aanic passages are referred to as the *tafseer* of the Qur’aan by the *Sunnah*. For example, in *Soorah al-Faatihah,* the Prophet (ﷺ) explained that “**al-maghdoobi ‘alayhim**” (those on whom is Allaah’s anger) are the Jews, and

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[71] *Soorah al-Mutaffifeen* (83):15.
[72] *Soorah an-Nahl* (16):44.
[73] *Soorah an-Nahl* (16):64.

“**ad-daalleen**” (those astray) are the Christians.[74] On one occasion he recited the verse:

﴿ وَأَعِدُّوا۟ لَهُم مَّا ٱسْتَطَعْتُم مِّن قُوَّةٍ ﴾

“Prepare for them whatever force you are able to.”[75]

He then said,

(أَلاَ إِنَّ الْقُوَّةَ الرَّمْيُ أَلاَ إِنَّ الْقُوَّةَ الرَّمْيُ أَلاَ إِنَّ الْقُوَّةَ الرَّمْيُ .)

“*Verily force is shooting.*” He repeated it three times.[76]

In another narration, he explained that the verse:

﴿ إِنَّآ أَعْطَيْنَـٰكَ ٱلْكَوْثَرَ ۝١ ﴾

“Verily, I have given you *al-Kawthar,*”[77]

referred to a river in Paradise which Allaah has given him.[78]

Because the *Sunnah* was based on guidance from Allaah, it represents the second part of God’s promise to explain the Qur’aan:



“Then, verily, it is for Me to explain it.”[79]

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[74] Reported by ‘Adee ibn Haatim and collected by at-Tirmithee and Ahmad. Rated *hasan* by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmithee*, vol. 3, pp. 19-20, no. 2353.

[75] *Soorah al-Anfaal* (8):60.

[76] Reported by ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Aamir and collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 1060, no. 4711). The word used in the *hadeeth* is *ramy*, which could mean shooting an arrow or throwing a spear. It can also be applied to firing a gun or a rocket.

[77] *Soorah al-Kawthar* (108):1.

[78] Reported by Anas and collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 220, no. 790) and Ahmad.

[79] *Soorah al-Qiyaamah* (75):19

Ibn ’Abbaas explained that the statement, **“Then it is for Me to explain it,”** means, “upon your tongue [O Muhammad].”[80] Consequently, no other human interpretation can be given precedence over that of the Prophet (ﷺ).

3. *Tafseer* of Qur’aan by *Aathaar*

Whenever the *sahaabah* could not find the *tafseer* of a passage in the Qur’aan itself or in the *Sunnah,* they would use their own reasoning based on their knowledge of the contexts of the verses and the intricacies of the Arabic language in which the Qur’aan was revealed. Consequently, one of the greatest commentators of the Qur’aan, Ibn Katheer, wrote in the preface of his *tafseer*, “If we are unable to find a suitable *tafseer* in the Qur’aan or in the *Sunnah*, we go to the opinions of the *sahaabah*. For verily, they knew the Qur’aan better than anyone else due to their knowledge of the circumstances of its revelation, their complete and accurate understanding of it, and their righteous deeds.” These explanations of the *sahaabah* are known as *tafseer* by *aathaar* (the sayings of the *sahaabah*). For example, when Ibn ‘Abbaas was questioned about the verse:

﴿ وَقُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَٰرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ﴾

> **“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity and to only reveal from their adornment that which (normally) appears,”**[81]

he replied, “It refers to the face and hands.”[82] On another occasion, after reciting the verse,

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[80] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 422, no. 450.

[81] *Soorah an-Noor* (24): 31.

[82] Collected by Ibn Abee Shaybah in *al-Musannaf*, vol. 4, p. 283, and al-Bayhaqee in *as-Sunan al-Kubraa*. Al-Albaanee ruled in *Jilbaab al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah*, pp. 59-60, that the *isnaad* of this statement is *saheeh*.

﴿ وَمَن لَّمْ يَحْكُم بِمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ فَأُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْكَـٰفِرُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾ ﴾

"And whoever does not judge by what Allaah has revealed, is a *kaafir* (disbeliever)."[83]

Ibn 'Abbaas said, "It is a form of *kufr* (disbelief) less than real *kufr*."[84]

However, the *tafseer* transmitted from the Prophet (ﷺ) and the *sahaabah* did not cover all of the verses of the Qur'aan. The Prophet (ﷺ) explained only what was unclear to the *sahaabah*, and they, in turn, only explained what was unclear to the *taabi'oon*. But with each succeeding generation, more areas became unclear due to the evolution of the language. Hence, the *taabi'oon* had to make further explanations after the passing of the *sahaabah's* era. These explanations are considered a part of *tafseer* by *aathaar* and should be given precedence over personal opinions where there is unanimity among them. Where they differed, none of their opinions is given preference over the others unless it is supported by the language.

During the era of the *taabi'oon*, many Christians and Jews became Muslim. As a result, some of the *taabi'oon* narrated tales from Jewish and Christian sources in their explanations of the Qur'aan. Such narrations became known as *Israa'eeleeyaat*. In later generations, the books of *tafseer* became filled with such narrations, many of which could not be traced to any reliable source.

4. *Tafseer* of Qur'aan by Language

With the passage of time, words took on new meanings and old meanings became lost, foreign words entered into the language, and vast sections of

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[83] *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):44.

[84] Collected by al-Haakim, vol. 2, p. 313. A similar statement was collected by Ibn Jareeer in his *Tafseer*, vol. 4, p. 597, no. 12068. This issue is one of the raging controversies of our time, the question being: Does Ibn 'Abbaas's statement apply to rulers in our time, who rule by mixtures of *Sharee'ah* law and man-made law? The position of most scholars seems to be that when the ruler believes that man-made laws are better than or as good as the *Sharee'ah,* or that even though they aren't as good as the *Sharee'ah,* it is permissible to rule by them, then he is a *kaafir* who has left Islaam. If, however, he applies man-made laws while believing that he is sinful in doing so, his *kufr* is *kufr* of actions, which makes him a major sinner, but doesn't place him out of the fold of Islaam. See *at-Tah-theer min Fitnah at-Takfeer* by Shaykh al-Albaanee, who provides copious documentation from the statements of classical and modern *salafee* scholars to support his position.

vocabulary fell into disuse. This natural process necessitated the explanation of some of the Qur'aanic words according to their literal and grammatical meanings. Consequently, this period witnessed the appearance of dictionaries written specifically to deal with Qur'aanic Arabic vocabulary and philology. In cases where words had more than one meaning, this step created differences of opinion which could only be solved by finding some support in the *Sunnah*. For example, "*lams*" literally means to touch, but figuratively it means sexual intercourse. Thus, the later scholars were of two basic opinions concerning the following verse,

﴿ أَوْ لَـٰمَسْتُمُ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا۟ مَآءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا۟ صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا ﴾

"...or you (*laamastum*) women and cannot find water, then make *tayammum* (ritual purification with dust)."[85]

Imaams ash-Shaafi'ee and Maalik held that it meant the touch of the hand, though each imaam added certain stipulations to it. On the other hand, Imaam Aboo Haneefah ruled that it meant sexual intercourse. However, the Prophet's wives reported that he kissed them before performing *salaah*, which indicated that touching was not intended by this verse.[86]

The four above-mentioned methods come under the general title of *tafseer bir-riwaayah* or *tafseer bil-ma'thoor* (*tafseer* based on narration) and, as such, leave little room for argument. Although the fourth step is oftentimes based on narrations from earlier generations, at other times it can be highly opinionated and controversial. For example, Yusuf Ali translates the word "*burooj*" used in the 85th *soorah* as "the Zodiacal signs," while Pickthall translates it as "Mansions of the Stars," but says in his introduction to the *soorah* that it "is applied to the signs of the zodiac." Thus, according to them, Allaah is making an oath by the zodiacal signs. Some English-speaking Muslims have taken this to be indirect support for astrology. However, "*burooj*" originally only meant "star con-figuration," and it was not until later times that it was used to refer to the imaginary figures of the

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[85] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):43.

[86] The *hadeeth* is reported by 'Aa'ishah and collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 1, p. 43, no. 179), at-Tirmithee, Ibn Maajah and Ahmad. Al-Albaanee authenticated it in *Saheeh Sunan Abee* Daawood, vol. 1, p. 36, no. 165.

zodiac that pagan Babylonians and Greeks superimposed on them. Astrology has been forbidden by the Prophet (ﷺ) in no uncertain terms, as it falls under the general prohibition on visiting fortunetellers. The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

(مَنْ أَتَى ... كَاهِنًا فَقَدْ كَفَرَ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ .)

"*Whoever...visits a fortuneteller [and believes in what he says]*[87] *has disbelieved in what was revealed to Muhammad.*"[88]

5. *Tafseer* of Qur'aan by Opinion

Opinions based on a careful study of the first four steps can be considered valid as long as they do not contradict any of those steps. Likewise, the application of obvious meanings of the Qur'aan to existing situations and the formation of conclusions based on their similarities are also allowed, as long as such interpretations do not clash with authentic classical explanations. But, free interpretation based on philosophical, scientific, or sectarian ideas is totally forbidden. The Prophet (ﷺ) was reported to have said,

(الْمِرَاءُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ كُفْرٌ .) ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ (فَمَا عَرَفْتُمْ مِنْهُ فَاعْمَلُوا وَمَا جَهِلْتُمْ مِنْهُ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى عَالِمِهِ .)

"*Opinion-based argument about the Qur'aan is* kufr." He repeated it three times, then said, "*What you know of it, act upon; and what you are ignorant of, refer it to one who knows.*"[89]

We can see from the above-mentioned *hadeeth* that the Prophet (ﷺ) sternly warned his companions and later generations of Muslims about interpretations of the Qur'aan based on speculation and unsubstantiated opinions. The reason is that the Qur'aan is the foundation of Islaam and, as such, it had to remain pure and untampered with. If free rein was given to any and everyone to interpret the Qur'aan as they wished, its value would be totally destroyed, and Islaam itself

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[87] The addition is from the version of Aboo Daawood.

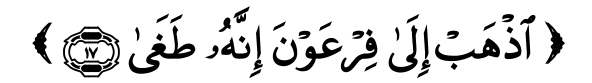
[88] Collected by at-Tirmithee and Ibn Maajah. A similar *hadeeth* was collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 3, p. 1095, no. 3895) and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 2, p 739, no. 3304.

[89] Reported by Aboo Hurayrah and collected by Ahmad, Ibn Jareer in his *Tafseer* and Aboo Ya'laa. Authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Silsilah al Ahaadeeth as-Saheehah*, vol. 4. pp. 26-8.

would be undermined from its base. Thus, the only acceptable *tafseer* is that which adheres to the following sequence: *tafseer* of Qur'aan by the Qur'aan, then by the *Sunnah,* then by the sayings of the *sahaabah,* then by language, and finally by opinion, as long as it is based on the preceding four methods and does not contradict any of them.

Deviant *Tafseers*

In order to clarify the potential danger and corruption inherent in *tafseer* by unsubstantiated opinion, the following examples of deviant *tafseers* have been collected from various movements, sects, and philosophical schools from the distant past to the present. From the tenth century CE (4th century AH), some Soofees have interpreted "Pharaoh" to mean the heart in Allaah's command to Prophet Moosaa:



"Go to Pharaoh, for verily he has transgressed,"[90]

as it is the heart which oppresses every man, causing him to transgress. Others interpreted Allaah's command to Prophet Moosaa:



"Throw down your staff,"[91]

as a command to throw aside the material world and only depend on Allaah. These spiritualistic *tafseers* are indicative of the Soofee movement's overemphasis of the spiritual over the material.

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[90] *Soorah an-Naazi'aat* (79):17.
[91] *Soorah an-Naml* (27):10.

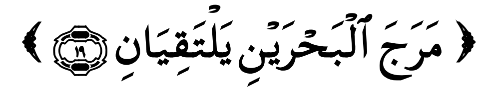
In the Mu‘tazilee (Rationalist) *tafseers* of the ‘Abbaasid era, revelation was interpreted according to human logic. Hence, the word “heart” in the following verse was given a new meaning:

﴿ وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَٰهِـۧمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِى كَيْفَ تُحْىِ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ ۖ قَالَ أَوَلَمْ تُؤْمِن ۖ قَالَ بَلَىٰ وَلَـٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِى ﴾

> **“And (remember) when Ibraaheem said, ‘My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead.’ [Allaah] replied, ‘Do you not believe?’ Ibraaheem said, ‘Yes, but (I am asking You) in order that my heart may be at rest.”**[92]

It was claimed that Ibraaheem had a friend whom he referred to as his “heart” and, thus, the true meaning of the verse was, “Yes, but I am asking You in order that my friend may be at ease.”[93] This interpretation was considered necessary to explain away the doubt which Ibraaheem felt in his heart, as it seemed inconsistent with prophethood, according to the Rationalists.

The Shee‘ah *tafseers* of the late ‘Abbaasid era, under the influence of their inordinate obsession with the Prophet’s descendants, interpreted the verse:



“He has let the two seas flow freely and they meet,”[94]

as a reference to ‘Alee, the Prophet’s son-in-law, and Faaṯimah, the Prophet’s daughter; and in a following verse:

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[92] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):260.

[93] This *tafseer* given by Ibn Fawrak is quoted in *Mabaaẖith fee ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan*, p. 358.

[94] *Soorah ar-Raẖmaan* (55):19.

﴿ يَخْرُجُ مِنْهُمَا ٱللُّؤْلُؤُ وَٱلْمَرْجَانُ ٢٢ ﴾

“Out of them come pearls and coral,”[95]

they found a reference to the Prophet’s grandsons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn.[96]

The Qaadiyanee sect, which appeared in India during the latter part of the nineteenth century, claimed that in the verse,

﴿ مَّا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَآ أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَٰكِن رَّسُولَ ٱللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ ﴾

> **“Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is Allaah’s messenger and the seal (*khaatam*) of the prophets,”**[97]

khaatam does not mean seal, as most translate it, but ring. Thus, they claimed that just as the ring beautifies the finger, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was the beautification of prophethood. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was the most superior of the prophets but not the last.[98] They also assert that even if the word *khaatam* were taken to mean “seal,” it would be like the seal placed on an envelope sealing its contents, but not limiting them. These interpretations were made to validate the claim of their founder, Ghulam Ahmad, to prophethood. They also distorted the following verse in reference to Prophet ‘Eesaa:

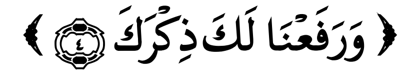
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[95] *Soorah ar-Rahmaan* (55):22.
[96] Ibn Baabooyah in *al-Khisaal*. Quoted in *Bihaar al-Anwaar*, vol. 24, pp. 97-9, nos. 1-7.
[97] *Soorah al-Ahzaab* (33):40.
[98] *Qadiyaniyat*, p. 306.

﴿وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَٰكِن شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ ... بَل رَّفَعَهُ ٱللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ﴾

"They did not crucify him nor did they kill him, but it was made to seem so to them....But Allaah raised him up to Himself."[99]

They claimed that "raised him up" meant a figurative raising, as used in the verse:



"And I raised your esteem for you."[100]

This interpretation was necessary in order for them to prove their doctrine that 'Eesaa died a natural death on earth after marrying and having children and being buried in Kashmir, and that Ghulam Ahmad was the promised messiah whose return was prophesied.[101]

Even more recently in America, Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Elijah sect and claimant to Prophethood (d. 1975), interpreted the verse,

﴿يَوْمَ يُنفَخُ فِي ٱلصُّورِ ۚ وَنَحْشُرُ ٱلْمُجْرِمِينَ يَوْمَئِذٍ زُرْقًا ﴿١٠٢﴾﴾

"On that day when the trumpet is blown, I will assemble the criminals blue-eyed,"[102]

as proof that the inhabitants of the fire will all be white people. This interpretation was used to support the Elijah doctrine that Allaah, God, was a black man, that all

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[99] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):157-8.
[100] *Soorah al-Inshiraah* (94):4.
[101] *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islaam*, p. 24.
[102] *Soorah Taa Haa* (20):102.

black people were gods and that all white people were devils.[103] Although the word *zurq* literally means blue, it was used to refer to the clouding of the cornea due to certain eye diseases which gives the eye a bluish-grey tinge. Hence, a more accurate translation would have been "bleary-eyed."

According to Elijah, since the white man resembles the black man, he was referred to as "mankind" in the Qur'aan, that is, a kind of man![104] Therefore, in the verse:

﴿ يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَـٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَىٰ ﴾

"O mankind, verily, We[105] have created you from a male and a female,"[106]

"We" was interpreted by Elijah to refer to the black men/gods who supposedly created the white race (mankind).[107]

These few examples of *tafseers* based solely on sectarian opinions clearly show the incoherence and deception that result from the disregard for the correct method of *tafseer*. The Qur'aan becomes a voice for each sect's deviant and heretical claims. The Qur'aan is manipulated mercilessly, as there are no logical boundaries nor coherent rules by which the founders of these sects abide; hence, the same verse may have a multiplicity of meanings for them. Whatever interpretation promotes their ideas become correct. For them, the Qur'aan is no longer a book of guidance, but a book containing the hidden secrets of their sect, which only their leaders and the specially initiated can unlock.

The Conditions for the *Mufassir*[108]

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[103] *Message to the Black Man in America*, p. 14.
[104] I.e., quasi-human.
[105] See footnote 23 on page 16 for an explanation of the meaning of 'We' when used by Allaah for himself.
[106] *Soorah al-Hujuraat* (49):13.
[107] *Message to the Black Man in America*, p. 118.
[108] One who makes *tafseer* of the Qur'aan.

From the information in the preceding chapter concerning the historical development of the *tafseer*, its correct methodology, and examples of deviant *tafseers*, the following conditions could be deduced as necessary for the achievement of an authentic *tafseer* of Qur'aan. Conversely, the omission of any one of the following conditions will more than likely result in a distorted interpretation of the Qur'aan:

1. Correct Belief

The *mufassir* first and foremost must possess a true belief in Islaam for his or her *tafseer* to be pure and free from heresy or gross errors. Sincerely believing in Islaam does not automatically mean that one who does so has true belief in Islaam. A true or correct belief exists only when one's conception of Islaam coincides with that of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions. Ignorance of what constitutes correct belief in Islaam will almost certainly lead the *mufassir* into incorrect explanations. Such an individual will be unable to distinguish between a correct interpretation and an incorrect one. Consequently, he or she will have to rely on their personal judgment, which would be impaired due to their ignorance. Correct belief is also non-sectarian. Such a belief frees the *mufassir* from the damaging influence of philosophies, schools of thought (*math-habs*), movements, and sects.[109] The *mufassir* does not approach the Qur'aan with preconceived ideas and notions for which he or she wishes to find support in the Qur'aan. Such an approach invariably leads to misinterpretations and sectarian explanations.

2. Correct Methodology

All honest attempts at *tafseer* must begin with the *tafseer* of the Qur'aan by Qur'aan itself. What remains unexplained must then be sought in the *Sunnah.* If the *tafseer* still cannot be found, the explanations of the *sahaabah* and their students must then be turned to. That which is left after the preceding steps can be found in the language of the Qur'aan. Such an approach to *tafseer* takes into account Allaah's role as the revealer and explainer of His revelation, the Prophet's role as the practical interpreter of Allaah's revelation, the *sahaabah* and their students' roles as the conveyers of Allaah's revelation and the Prophet's

[109] *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, pp. 329-30.

interpretation and application of it, and the role of classical Arabic as the vehicle in which the revelation and its explanation were transmitted.

Any other approach negates one or more of these vital roles and implies either a claim of direct revelation from God or an understanding superior to that of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions. A brief glance at the *tafseer* of those ignoring these steps will expose their claims to divine revelation cloaked in terms like "*ilhaam*" (inspiration) and "*kashf*" (illumination).

3. Correct Knowledge

The *mufassir* must have working knowledge of classical Arabic, its grammatical constructions, and its figures of speech, because this is the language of the Qur'aan. Any *tafseer* which is based solely on a translation of some of the meanings of the Qur'aan will be liable to distortion. As Mujaahid, the student of Ibn 'Abbaas, said, "It is not allowable for anyone who believes in Allaah and the Last Day to explain Allaah's Book if he is not knowledgeable in the Arabic language."[110] The *mufassir* should also know the other Islaamic sciences which are connected in one way or another to the Qur'aan, such as *hadeeth* and *fiqh.* He should be familiar with the science of *hadeeth* in order to make sure that explanations attributed to the Prophet (ﷺ) or his companions that he uses in his *tafseer* are authentic. He should also know the fundamental principles of *fiqh (usool al-fiqh)* in order to accurately extract or deduce Islaamic law from its passages. Without a correct understanding of these two sciences, the *mufassir* could not possibly escape including in his *tafseer* a wealth of misinformation, since the body of weak and fabricated narrations is quite vast and the schools of *fiqh* (Islaamic law) and their methods are many and varied.

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[110] Quoted in *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, p. 331.

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BOOKS OF *TAFSEER*

The books of *tafseer* have been divided into two general categories according to the emphasis of their authors in their explanations. The *tafseer*s of those who restricted their expla-nations to transmitting what was explained in the Qur'aan or stated by the Prophet (ﷺ), his companions, and their students were referred to as *tafseer bir-riwaayah* or *tafseer bil-ma'thoor* (*tafseer* according to transmission). The authors of such *tafseers* also avoided unfounded interpretations and unnecessary expla-nations and always accepted authentic narrations. This is not to say that such *tafseers* are totally free of personal judgment and opinion, for any *tafseer*, of necessity, must reflect the opinion of the individual who compiles it. But in this case, personal opinion was kept to a minimum.

On the other hand, those *tafseers* in which the authors often relied on their personal opinions for explanations, inter-pretations and deductions were called *tafseer bid-diraayah* or *tafseer bir-ra'y* (*tafseer* according to opinion). In some of these types of *tafseers*, narrated explanations from the Prophet (ﷺ), the *sahaabah,*and their students *(taabi'oon)* are mentioned prior to personal interpretation, and the deductions or opinions are in agreement with narrated explanations, grammatical rules, and lexical meanings, while in others there is a partial or even total disregard for narrated explanations, grammatical rules, and word meanings. *Tafseers* of the first type are acceptable, while those based mostly or solely on unfounded opinion are considered heretical or bordering on heresy. Allaah and His Prophet (ﷺ) have expressly forbidden unfounded explanations of the Qur'aan. For example, it was forbidden in the verse,

﴿ وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِۦ عِلْمٌ ﴾

“And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge.”[111]

The Prophet (ﷺ) also condemned expression of uninformed opinion in religious matters, saying,

(إِنَّ اللَّهَ لاَ يَنْزِعُ الْعِلْمَ بَعْدَ أَنْ أَعْطَاكُمُوهُ انْتِزَاعًا وَلَكِنْ يَنْتَزِعُهُ مِنْهُمْ مَعَ قَبْضِ الْعُلَمَاءِ بِعِلْمِهِمْ فَيَبْقَى نَاسٌ جُهَّالٌ يُسْتَفْتَوْنَ فَيُفْتُونَ بِرَأْيِهِمْ فَيُضِلُّونَ وَيَضِلُّونَ .)

“Allaah won’t remove knowledge after giving it to you by removing it (from you). Rather he will remove it from (later generations) by taking (the souls of) the scholars along with their knowledge, until only ignorant people remain. They will be asked for religious verdicts, so they will issue verdicts based on their opinions, leading others astray and going astray themselves.”[112]

Therefore, it could be generally said that narrations from the Prophet (ﷺ), the *s̲ah̲aabah,* and the *taabi‘oon* are superior to those based on opinion. But if the narrations are not authentic, such *tafseers* may then be actually worse than some of those based on opinion.

A brief description of some of the most famous *tafseers* and their authors follows.

TAFSEER BIR-RIWAAYAH

1. *Tafseer* Ibn ‘At̲eeyah, *al-Muh̲arrar al-Wajeez*

Abdul-H̲aqq ibn ‘At̲eeyah al-Andaloosee (1089-1146 CE/481-540 AH) was a Maalikee scholar and judge in both Spain and Morocco. Ibn ‘At̲eeyah’s *tafseer* contains a summary of accurate narrations found in the earlier *tafseers bir-riwaayah.* He also included many examples from classical literature and discussed extensively the grammatical wonders of the Qur’aan. A number of scholars preferred Ibn ‘At̲eeyah’s *tafseer* over that of az-Zamakhsharee’s.[113] This *tafseer*

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[111] *Soorah al-Israa’* (17):36.
[112] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 9, pp. 305-6, no. 410.
[113] *At-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 248-52.

consists of twenty volumes in manuscript form. It has recently been published in sixteen volumes.[114]

2. *Tafseer* Abil-Layth as-Samarqandee, *Bahr al-‘Uloom*

Abul-Layth ibn Ibraaheem as-Samarqandee (d. 983 CE/ 372 AH) was a *fiqh* scholar of the Hanafee school and was nicknamed “*Imaam al-Hind.*” His *tafseer* was based on *hadeeths* and narrations from the *sahaabah,* the *taabi‘oon,* and later scholars. However, it does contain some weak narrations, and the chains of narrations for statements from the *sahaabah* and *taabi‘oon* were not mentioned, nor were their opinions analyzed. This *tafseer* consists of four volumes and is in print.[115]

3. *Tafseer* Abee Ishaaq, *al-Kashf wa al-Bayaan ‘an Tafseer al-Qur’aan*

Aboo Ishaaq, Ahmad ibn Ibraaheem ath-Tha‘labee (d. 1036 CE/427 AH), from Nishapur, was a well-known Quraa’nic reciter of his time. In his *tafseer,* the chains of narrations from the *sahaabah* are mentioned but condensed. Grammatical explanations are quite extensive and legal issues are discussed at length. However, Aboo Ishaaq also mentions a vast number of *Israa’eeleeyaat* (Biblical stories) without any critical analysis of their content whatsoever. Moreover, he also included many weak and fabricated *hadeeths* in his *tafseer* due to his weak background in the science of *hadeeth.*[116]

4. *Tafseer* Ibn Jareer at-Tabaree, *Jaami‘ al-Bayaan fee Tafseer al-Qur’aan*

Muhammad Ibn Jareer at-Tabaree (839-923 CE/225-310 AH) was from Tabreez, in what is now western Iran, and was a well-known legalist, *hadeeth* scholar, and historian. Although originally a Shaafi‘ee scholar, he reached the level of *ijtihaad* and became independent of the school. His *tafseer* is the oldest *tafseer* to reach us intact. It contains narrations which are analyzed in most cases. He mentioned the various recitations and their implications and he included many Biblical tales which were discussed, and the positions of unorthodox schools, such as that of the Mu‘tazilees, were mentioned and refuted. All later *tafseers* have depended on this *tafseer* in one way or another.[117] One of the more useful of the many printed

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[114] Published by Maktabah Ibn Taymeeyah, Cairo, 1992. There are other editions as well.
[115] *At-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 235-7.
[116] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 238-45.
[117] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 215-34.

editions of this massive work is the one containing the comments of Ahmad Shaakir on the *isnaads* of the many narrations cited by the author. Unfortunately, the authentication effort was cut short by Shakir's death, having only completed up to verse five of *Soorah Maa'idah.*[118]

5. *Tafseer* al-Baghawee, *Ma'aalim at-Tanzeel*

Al-Husayn ibn Muhammad al-Baghawee (d. 1117 CE/ 510 AH) was an eminent jurist of the Shaafi'ee school and one of the foremost *hadeeth* scholars of his time. His *tafseer* was a condensed version of *Tafseer ath-Tha'labee*, in which the majority of weak and fabricated narrations were removed and all the chains of narrators were mentioned. He also removed various heretical concepts mentioned in ath-Tha'labee's *tafseer*, as well as scientific information not directly related to *tafseer*. Al-Baghawee briefly mentions some of the various recitations and explains grammatical constructions only where it is absolutely necessary. There are a few *Israa'eeleeyaat* mentioned without critical analysis and some conflicting opinions of early scholars which are also mentioned without evaluation. This *tafseer* has been printed in a single edition along with Ibn Katheer's *tafseer* and *Tafseer al-Khaazin* and is among the most reliable *tafseers* based on narration.[119]

6. *Tafseer* Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Qur'aan al-Atheem*

Abul-Fidaa' Ismaa'eel ibn Katheer ad-Dimishqee (1300-1373 CE/699-774 AH) was a Shaafi'ee *fiqh* scholar and a student of Ibn Taymeeyah. He was also an eminent *hadeeth* scholar and a historian. His historical work, *al-Bidaayah wa an-Nihaayah,* is considered the most authentic Islaamic history book. *Tafseer ibn Katheer* is also considered the most authentic book of *tafseer*, and is second only to *Tafseer at-Tabaree* in popularity among scholars. The book contains an extensive preface covering the methodology of *tafseer*, and great emphasis has been placed upon the interpretation of Qur'aan by Qur'aan. Ibn Katheer critically analyzes all of his narrations and evaluates the conflicting statements of the *sahaabah* and the *taabi'oon*. He also warns against the dangers of *Israa'eeleeyaat* and other false information commonly found in *tafseers*. Legal issues are

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[118] Printed by Daar al-Ma'aarif in Cairo.

[119] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 245-8.

discussed, and differences of opinion are evaluated.[120] An abridged version of this *tafseer*, from which the inauthentic narrations has been removed, was published in four volumes in the 1980s.[121]

7. *Tafseer* ath-Tha'labee, *al-Jawaahir al-Hisaan fee Tafseer al-Qur'aan*

Abdur-Rahmaan ibn Makhloof ath-Tha'labee al-Jazaa'iree (d. 1472 CE/877 AH) was a North African Maalikee scholar well known for his piety and knowledge. His *tafseer* was an abridgement of Ibn 'Ateeyah's *tafseer*, to which he added information from other famous classical *tafseers*, especially that of at-Tabaree. The *hadeeths* mentioned were from all the well-known works, and *Israa'eeleeyaat* were all evaluated. Ath-Tha'labee lists some of the variant recitations and discusses some grammatical issues, but for the most part, his *tafseer* is a condensation and compilation of previous works with very little added from himself.[122]

8. *Tafseer* Jalaalud-Deen as-Suyootee, *ad-Durr al-Manthoor fee at-Tafseer bi al-Ma'thoor*

Jalaalud-Deen 'Abdur-Rahmaan ibn Muhammad as-Suyootee (1445-1505 CE/849-910 AH) was a great Shaafi'ee *fiqh* scholar, as well as the foremost *hadeeth* scholar of his time. At first, he wrote a four volume *tafseer* called *Turjumaan al-Qur'aan,* in which he placed over ten thousand *hadeeths* along with their chains of narration. When he found his students uninterested in learning chains of narration, he condensed the *tafseer* by deleting the chains and merely mentioned the books from which the *hadeeths* were taken. This *tafseer* was renamed *ad-Durr al-Manthoor.* In spite of his knowledge of the *hadeeth* sciences, he seems to have been only concerned with gathering the largest possible quantity of *hadeeths*, without discriminating between the true and the false.[123]

9. *Tafseer* ash-Shawkaanee, *Fat-h al-Qadeer*

Muhammad ibn 'Alee ash-Shawkaanee (d. 1839 CE 1255 AH) was a resident of San'aa, Yemen who started his quest for knowledge as a student of the Zaydee

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[120] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 252-7.
[121] Abridged by Ar-Rafaa'ee.
[122] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 257-61.
[123] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 261-4.

math-hab. He studied *hadeeth* sciences extensively and became independent of his *math-hab*. In his *tafseer*, ash-Shawkaanee has combined both methods of *tafseer* (by opinion and by narration). He has condensed the *hadeeth* chains and has mentioned the books in which each *hadeeth* may be found, and most opinions are attributed to their sources. Grammatical, legal, and philosophical issues are discussed and the positions of the great commentators are mentioned. This *tafseer* is printed in five volumes and is widely favored among orthodox scholars. A recent edition has footnotes that extensively document the *hadeeths* cited by the author.[124]

10. *Tafseer* Ibn 'Abbaas, *Tanweer al-Miqbaas min Tafseer Ibn 'Abbaas*

This *tafseer* was compiled by Muhammad ibn Ya'qoob al-Fayroozaabaadee (d. 1414 CE/817 AH), who was a Shaafi'ee scholar and author of the famous Arabic dictionary, *al-Qaamoos al-Muheet*. The vast majority of this *tafseer* consists of explanatory statements attributed to the great *sahaabee* and *mufassir*, Ibn 'Abbaas. The author mentions the chains of narrators for each section of *tafseer*. Hence, this *tafseer* is considered as being among the *tafseers bir-riwaayah*. However, chains of narration attributed to Ibn 'Abbaas vary in their level of authenticity, depending upon the reliability of the narrators themselves. Chains from Mu'aawiyah ibn Saalih and Qays ibn Muslim al-Koofee are considered *saheeh* (highly authentic) and those from Ibn Is-haaq (the historian) are considered *hasan* (authentic); while those from Ismaa'eel ibn 'Abdur-Rahmaan as-Suddee al-Kabeer and 'Abdul Maalik ibn Jurayj are doubtful. Those from ad-Dahhaak ibn Mazaahim al-Hilaalee, 'Ateeyah al-'Awfee, Muqaatil ibn Sulaymaan al-Azdee, and Muhammad ibn as-Saa'ib al-Kalabee, who was accused of fabricating *hadeeths*, are all *da'eef* (unacceptable). Nearly all of the so-called "*Tafseer* of Ibn 'Abbaas" is based on statements narrated in chains containing Muhammad ibn as-Saa'ib al-Kalabee. Hence, this *tafseer* is considered unreliable for the most part; and, despite its popularity among the masses, it is totally rejected by Muslim scholars.[125]

TAFSEER BID-DIRAAYAH

1. *Tafseer* Fakhrud-Deen ar-Raazee, *Mafaateeh al-Ghayb*

Fakhrud-Deen ibn 'Alee ar-Raazee (1150-1210 CE/544-606 AH) was a Shaafi'ee scholar who excelled in the grammatical sciences as well as philosophy.

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[124] *Fat-h al-Qadeer*, documentation by Sayyid Ibraaheem (Cairo: Daar al-Hadeeth, n.d.).
[125] See *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan,* pp. 360-62 and *at-Tafseer wa al Mufassiroon*, pp. 81-3.

His *tafseer* is printed in eight large volumes; however, his contemporaries mentioned that Fakhrud-Deen did not complete his *tafseer*. It has been suggested that the work was completed by his disciple, Shams ad-Deen Ahmad ibn al-Khaleel al-Khuwayyee.[126] Ar-Raazee's *tafseer* is quite popular among scholars due to its extensive treatment of various topics from a wide range of sciences. This *tafseer* is noted for its concentration on the relationship between verses and chapters. However, the *tafseer* is, for the most part, like an encyclopedia of natural sciences. The author delves into mathematics and natural sciences and evaluates the opinions of astronomers and philosophers using their terminology. The various arguments of the Mu'tazilah are mentioned and mildly refuted and the positions of the various *fiqh math-habs* are explained whenever verses containing legal issues appear. However, he always favors his school, the Shaafi'ee *math-hab* on legal issues. Ar-Raazee also discussed grammatical issues, but to a much lesser extent than his discussions of natural sciences.[127]

2. *Tafseer* al-Qurtubee, *Jaami' Ahkaam al-Qur'aan wa al-Mubayyin li Maa Tadammana min as-Sunnah wa Aay al-Furqaan*

Aboo 'Abdillaah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ansaaree al-Qurtubee (d. 1273 CE/671 AH) was born in Cordoba in what is now Spain. He started his studies there and participated in jihaad against the Christians, in the course of which he was captured, but he managed to escape.[128] He eventually travelled to the east, settling in Egypt, where he died. He is most famous for his *tafseer*, but he is also noted for his book on the afterlife, *at-Tathkirah bi Ahwaal al-Mawtaa wa Ahwaal al-Aakhirah* and a book on *zuhd*, the downplaying of worldly ambitions in order to concentrate on success in the hereafter.[129]

His *tafseer* starts with an introduction of some seventy pages on the virtues of the Qur'aan, the etiquettes of its recitation and the proper methodology of *tafseer*. The *tafseer* is characterized by a heavy emphasis on *fiqh* issues, but it is by no means limited to that. One may consider al-Qurtubee's work in the category of *at-tafseer bid-diraayah* because *fiqh* by its nature involves deductions from the texts. However, he includes the *hadeeths* relevant to each verse, as well as explanations of the *sahaabah, taabi'oon* and major scholars, although usually stripped of the *isnaad*. When quoting a *hadeeth*, he cites the book where it may be found or the

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[126] See *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p. 470.
[127] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon,* vol. 1, pp. 298-304.
[128] See *al-Jaami' li Ahkaam al-Qur'aan*, vol. 10, pp. 175-6.
[129] See *Shatharaat ath-Thahab*, vol. 5, p. 335, and *al-Jaami' li Ahkaam al-Qur'aan*, vol. 1, publisher's preface.

author who mentioned it. After presenting the text of a verse, he will state the number of issues relating to it that he plans to discuss. He usually starts with an explanation of the vocabulary of the verse, quoting a line or two of poetry to illustrate the definition of any difficult words. He also mentions variant recitations and their reciters. In discussing *fiqh* issues, he mentions the major opinions along with their evidence, then evaluates them. He generally supports the Maalikee position, although not always. He also refutes deviant sects like the Shee‘ah, the Mu‘tazilah, and the Qadareeyah, but he does so with scholarly etiquette. His *tafseer* is considered one of the monumental works in this field, and is indispensable for the *fiqh* issues of the Qur’aan.[130]

3. *Tafseer* al-Baydaawee, *Anwaar at-Tanzeel wa Asraar at-Ta’weel*

Naasirud-Deen, ‘Abdullaah ibn ‘Alee al-Baydaawee (d. 1291 CE/691 AH) was a Persian scholar of the Shaafi‘ee *math-hab* and was appointed chief judge of Shiraaz. His *tafseer* was an abridgement of *al-Kash-shaaf* by az-Zamakhsharee, with most of the Mu‘tazilee philosophy deleted. However, he does occasionally get caught up in az-Zamakhsharee’s explanations. He has also followed az-Zamakhsharee’s practice of mentioning at the end of every chapter weak and fabricated *hadeeths* extolling the virtues of reading that chapter. Al-Baydaawee draws some of his material from *Mafaateeh al-Ghayb* of ar-Raazee and *Tafseer ar-Raaghib al-Isfahaanee* and includes narrations from the *sahaabah* and the *taabi‘oon.* Hence, he does not leave any verse about the wonders of creation without expounding on the theories and facts of natural sciences. He also mentions Qur’aanic recitations, but does not limit himself to the authentic ones. Nevertheless, the *tafseer* is quite free from *Israa’eeleeyaat.* Its language is also very polished and elegant. Islaamic scholars throughout the ages have held this *tafseer* in high esteem, and many commentaries on it and annotated versions of it have been produced.[131]

3. *Tafseer* an-Nasafee, *Madaarik at-Tanzeel wa Haqaa’iq at-Ta’weel*

‘Abdullaah ibn Mahmood an-Nasafee (d. 1302 CE/701 AH) was a Hanafee scholar of wide renown. He wrote numerous books on *usool al-fiqh* and commentaries on earlier works. His *tafseer* was an abridgement of al-Baydaawee’s *tafseer* in which he deleted the fabricated *hadeeths* on the virtues of

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[130] See *al-Jaami‘ li Ahkaam al-Qur’aan*, vol.1, pp. 6-7, Author’s Introduction, and *al Mabaahith fee ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan*, p. 391.

[131] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon,* vol. 1, pp. 304-11.

each chapter. In his discussions of the various recitations, he limits himself to the authentic seven and attributes each to its reciter. An-Nasafee debated the various legal issues connected with verses by explaining the arguments of each *math-hab,* refuting them and supporting the positions of his own *math-hab*, the Hanafee school. Discussions of grammatical issues are mostly very brief. On the whole, the *tafseer* is medium-sized and its style is brief and clear.[132]

4. *Tafseer* al-Khaazin, *Lubaab at-Ta'weel fee Ma'aani at-Tanzeel*

'Alee ibn Khaleel ash-Shayhee (1279-1340 CE/678-740 AH) was known by the nickname of "*al-Khaazin*" (the warehouseman) because he used to be in charge of a book warehouse in Damascus. This Shaafi'ee scholar was born and raised in Baghdaad, but did the greater part of his studies in Damascus. He wrote a vast number of books on a variety of topics, such as the ten-volume work called *Maqbool al-Manqool,* in which he gathered the *hadeeths* found in the *Musnads* of ash-Shaafi'ee and Ahmad, the six major books, the *Muwatta'* of Maalik, and the *Sunan* of ad-Daaraqutnee. His *tafseer* is a condensed version of al-Baghawee's *tafseer* with additions from earlier *tafseers.* He mentions many Biblical tales (*Israa'eeleeyaat*) without evaluating them. Al-Khaazin also wrote extensively on the battles which took place during the Prophet's era wherever mention was made of them in the verses. His *tafseer* also deals with legal issues in great detail, sometimes touching on areas not related to *tafseer* at all. There is also great emphasis in the *tafseer* on spiritual lessons and advice, a reflection of al-Khaazin's Soofee leanings. The *tafseer* is in seven medium-sized volumes and is in wide circulation and is particularly liked by those who enjoy stories; however, the *tafseer* needs critical revision before being used as a reliable reference for scholars.[133]

5. *Tafseer* Abee Hayyaan, *al-Bahr al-Muheet*

Muhammad ibn Yoosuf ibn Hayyaan al-Andaloosee (1256-1344 CE/654-745 AH), more commonly known by the name Aboo Hayyaan, was a scholar in the field of recitations and poetry and was a master in the field of grammar. In his early years, he belonged to the Thaahiree school of law, but later left it for the Shaafi'ee school. He studied in schools throughout North Africa and eventually

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[132] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon,* vol. 1, pp. 311-17.
[133] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon,* vol. 1, pp. 318-24.

settled in Egypt. This *tafseer* is in eight large volumes and is widely used by scholars as an important reference work on grammatical constructions in the Qur'aan. Aboo Hayyaan mentions in detail the differences among grammarians and makes most of his *tafseer* from a grammatical point of view, so much so that it bears a closer resemblance to a grammar book than it does to a *tafseer* of the Qur'aan. However, he does develop the other areas of *tafseer*, such as *fiqh* issues, recitations, Qur'aanic eloquence, and narrations from early orthodox scholars. In numerous places, he also refutes many of az-Zamakhsharee's philosophical arguments, as well as his grammatical positions.[134]

6. *Tafseer* an-Naysaabooree, *Gharaa'ib al-Qur'aan wa Raghaa'ib al-Furqaan*

Nithaamud-Deen ibn al-Hasan an-Naysaabooree (d.1328 CE/728 AH), nicknamed an-Nithaam al-A'raj, was born in Qum, but grew up in Nishapur, where he became a famous literary scholar, grammarian, and Qur'aan reciter. An-Naysaabooree wrote his *tafseer* by critically condensing ar-Raazee's *tafseer*, adding additional material from *al-Kash-shaaf* and other *tafseers*, as well as *tafseers* of the *sahaabah* and *taabi'oon*. The format used in his *tafseer* is quite unique among *tafseers*. After mentioning the verse, he mentions the various recitations, carefully attributing them to one of the ten major reciters. Then he mentions the possible places where pauses may take place and explains the resulting meanings of the verse. After that, he discusses the relationship between verses and begins the *tafseer* by explaining the grammatical meaning of the verses. He then mentions the *fiqh* issues and the opinions of the various philosophical and theological arguments, firmly defending the orthodox position of *Ahl as-Sunnah*. Verses concerning the wonders of creation are discussed from the viewpoint of natural sciences. Due to the author's strong Soofee leanings, he delves into the spiritual implications and his personal enlightenment at the end of each verse's *tafseer*. This *tafseer* is presently printed in the margin of one edition of *Tafseer at-Tabaree* and is widely read by scholars.[135]

7. *Tafseer al-Jalaalayn*

This *tafseer* is the product of two scholars, both of whom had the title, "Jalaalud-Deen" (Glory of the Religion): Jalaal ad-Deen as-Suyootee (1445-1505 CE), author of *ad-Durr al-Manthoor*, and Jalaalud-Deen al-Mahallee (1389-1460

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[134] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 325-9.
[135] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 329-40.

CE/791-864 AH). The former was discussed previously, so we will only concern ourselves with the latter. His name was Muhammad ibn Ibraaheem al-Mahallee and his birthplace was Egypt. He became a great scholar of the Shaafi‘ee *math-hab* and refused the post of the chief judge, preferring to teach *fiqh* in the local schools and engage in trade. He wrote a number of simple and concise books in various fields which became very popular. He began his *tafseer* starting with *Soorah al-Kahf* (18) and ending with *Soorah an-Naas* (114). He then did the *tafseer* of the first *soorah, al-Faatihah;* however, he died before completing the rest. As-Suyootee then began from *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2) and ended with *Soorah al-Israa'* (17), which is a little less than one half of the Qur'aan. He followed al-Mahallee's format. The basic meanings of the verses are explained and the most probable opinions are mentioned. Grammatical explanations are only relied on where absolutely necessary. Some reference is also made to the more famous recitations. There are very few areas where the two authors differed. One of them concerns the *rooh* (soul), which al-Mahallee explains in *Soorah Saad* (38) as a subtle body or substance that brings man to life when it is blown into him. As-Suyootee agrees with him in his own *tafseer* of *Soorah al-Hijr* (15), but in his *tafseer* of verse 85 of *Soorah al-Israa':*

﴿ وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلرُّوحِ ۖ قُلِ ٱلرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّى وَمَآ أُوتِيتُم مِّنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٨٥﴾ ﴾

> **"And they ask you about the *rooh.* Say: 'The *rooh* is by my Lord's command,' for you have been only given a little amount of knowledge,"**[136]

as-Suyootee contradicts al-Mahallee. He wrote that this verse clearly indicates that the reality of the *rooh* is the exclusive knowledge of Allaah; hence, it would be better not to try to define it. In spite of this *tafseer's* brevity (one volume), it is without a doubt a very valuable work and it is among the most popular *tafseers.*

[136] *Soorah al-Israa'* (17):85.

Numerous editions have been printed, and many commentaries have been written on it, the most famous being *Haasheyah al-Jamal* and *Haasheyah as-Saawee.*[137]

8. *Tafseer* al-Khateeb ash-Shirbeenee, *As-Siraaj al-Muneer*

Muhammad ibn Muhammad ash-Shirbeenee (d. 1569 CE/1569 AH) was an Egyptian scholar of the Shaafi'ee school of legal thought. He was most commonly known by the title, "*al-Khateeb.*" His *tafseer* is a concise abridgement of earlier *tafseers* and is filled with many quotes from *Tafseer ar-Raazee.* He avoids conflicting opinions, choosing only the most suitable or likely among them. Grammatical breakdowns are only given where necessary and, occasionally, recitations from the famous seven mentioned. Also, he only mentions reliable *hadeeths (saheeh* or *hasan)* and criticizes some of the earlier *mufassirs*, like az-Zamakhsharee and al-Baydaawee, for their use of fabricated *hadeeths.* Ash-Shirbeenee took care to note various problematic verses and the relationship between verses. As for legal issues, he only mentions them occasionally and in concise terms. However, the author often mentions weird stories and the strangest of *Israa'eeleeyaat* without making any comment on their accuracy.[138]

9. *Tafseer* Abis-Sa'ood, *Irshaad al-'Aql as-Saleem ilaa Mazaayaa al-Kitaab al-Kareem*

Abus-Sa'ood Muhammad ibn Mustafaa al-'Imaadee (1489-1574 CE/894-982 AH) was born in a village near Constantinople and became a scholar of the Hanafee school. He taught in many Turkish Islaamic schools and was appointed judge in a number of cities, including Constantinople itself. Later, he was appointed a *muftee* and remained one for over thirty years.[139] His *tafseer* was based on *al-Kash-shaaf* and that of al-Baydaawee, except that he avoided many of their pitfalls. He did, however, fall into the trap of mentioning fabricated *hadeeths* concerning the merits of each *soorah.* The author spends a great deal of effort explaining the eloquence and miraculous construction of Qur'aanic expressions. He only mentions variant recitations where they further explain the verses.

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[137] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon,* vol. 1, pp. 341-5.

[138] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon,* vol. 1, pp. 346-52.

[139] In fact, he was probably the single most influential scholar in the history of the Ottoman empire. See *The Venture of Islaam,* vol. 3, *The Gunpowder Empires*, pp. 110-11.

Very few *Israa'eeleeyaat* are mentioned and the various legal opinions on legal issues are listed only occasionally. He sometimes mentions the various grammatical meanings of verses and chooses the most appropriate after producing proof to that effect. The *tafseer* has been reprinted in five medium-sized volumes numerous times and is quite popular among scholars due to its clarity and beauty.[140]

10. *Tafseer* al-Aaloosee, *Rooh al-Ma'aanee fee Tafseer al-Qur'aan al-Atheem wa as-Sab' al-Mathaanee*

As-Sayyid Mahmood Afandee al-Aaloosee[141] (1802-1853 CE/1217-1269 AH) was among the greatest Shaafi'ee scholars of 'Iraaq. He was appointed *muftee* of Baghdaad and was very familiar with the legal positions of the various *math-habs*. In fact, he often followed the opinions of Aboo Haneefah on many issues. The author has compiled in his *tafseer* the opinions and narrations of the early scholars and the explanations of latter-day scholars with great care and honesty. All statements are attributed to their authors, and their conflicting opinions are weighed without any bias. Al-Aaloosee often times refutes the unorthodox interpretations and heretical explanations of the Mu'tazilees and the Shee'ah. He also mentions the scientific theories relating to the verses on creation and criticizes those he considers inaccurate or unlikely. Grammatical and legal issues are discussed at great length through the *tafseer* without bias. Al-Aaloosee severely criticizes the *Israa'eeleeyaat* and even ridicules them occasionally. He also mentions the variant recitations, but does not restrict himself to the authentic ones. Many quotes from classical literature are used to support his grammatical arguments, and he usually closes off his *tafseer* by mentioning the spiritual implications.

Rooh al-Ma'aanee is a virtual *tafseer* encyclopedia, in which most of what has been written on *tafseer* has been gathered and critically presented. Despite the author's occasional overemphasis on technical areas not directly related to *tafseer*, his approach is always balanced and unbiased.[142]

Tafseers of the Mu'tazilees

The Mu'tazilee scholars interpreted the Qur'aan in such a way as to support and defend their unique and unorthodox ideas which had never before been expressed by the early scholars among the *sahaabah*, the *taabi'oon*, or their

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[140] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 353-60.
[141] Aaloos is the name of an island in the Euphrates River. His foreparents inhabited a village on it.
[142] See *at -Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 360-70.

students. Many of their early *tafseers*, like those of orthodox scholars, were lost in time and we only know about them from references made to them by their contemporaries. Their method of *tafseer* is considered *tafseer bid-diraayah* of the worst kind. Such *tafseers* are noted for their total disregard for the opinions of the early *mufassirs*, as well as their complete dismissal of classical lexical meanings. The following are brief reviews of Mu‘tazilee-oriented *tafseers* which have survived until today:

1. *Tafseer* ‘Abdul-Jabbaar al-Hamdaanee, *Tanzeeh al-Qur’aan ‘an al-Mataa‘in.*

‘Abdul-Jabbaar ibn Ahmad al-Hamdaanee (d. 1024 CE/ 415 AH), a major Mu‘tazilee scholar of his time, was appointed judge of the city of Rayy, where he lectured until he died. He authored books in *usool al-fiqh* and other Islaamic sciences, as well as a highly acclaimed historical work called *Dalaa’il an-Nuboowah* (Proofs of the Prophethood). His *tafseer* is not a complete explanation of the Qur’aan, as only the controversial and equivocal verses are interpreted in order to refute the position of Sunnee scholars. The *tafseer* begins with *Soorah al-Faatihah* (1) and ends with *Soorah an-Naas* (114); however, many chapters and verses remain unexplained. The book is organized around certain issues whereby a problem is presented and its solution proposed.[143]

2. *Tafseer* ash-Shareef al-Murtadaa, *Gharar al-Fawaa’id wa Durar al-Qabaa’id*

‘Alee ibn at-Taahir, Aboo Ahmad al-Husayn (966-1048 CE/355-439 AH) traces his ancestry back to the Shee‘ah Imaam Moosaa al-Kaathim, the son of Ja‘far as-Saadiq. He was the main scholar of the Shee‘ah in ‘Iraaq and an adamant follower of the Mu‘tazilee school of thought. The book of sayings attributed to ‘Alee ibn Abee Taalib, *Nahj al-Balaaghah,* was written either by him or by his brother, Shareef Ridaa. Shareef Murtadaa’s *tafseer* contains lectures which he dictated in eighty lessons, covering studies in *tafseer, hadeeth,*and literature. Hence, this *tafseer* was nicknamed “*Amaalee ash-Shareef al-Murtadaa*” (*The Dictations of Shareef Murtadaa*). The *tafseer* section of the book does not explain all of the Qur’aan, but instead interprets selected passages in such a way as to establish the fundamental principles of the Mu‘tazilees. The author also skillfully takes certain verses which obviously contradict some of the Mu‘tazilee

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[143] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon*, vol. 1, pp. 399-410

fundamentals and neutralizes them with unorthodox linguistic explanations. In fact, the whole *tafseer* has a heavily linguistic, analytical slant.[144]

3. *Tafseer* az-Zamakhsharee, *al-Kash-shaaf 'an Haqaa'iq at-Tanzeel*

Mahmood ibn 'Umar az-Zamakhsharee al-Khwaarazmee (1075-1144 CE/467-538 AH) was a Hanafee scholar who studied in Baghdaad and Khurasaan and wrote a number of books on Arabic literature and grammar, *usool al-fiqh, hadeeth* commentary, etc. Despite az-Zamakhsharee's blatant Mu'tazilee leanings, his *tafseer* is considered a literary masterpiece. His explanations of the various miraculous aspects of the Qur'aan were the most detailed and extensive written, and his discussions of the beauty of Qur'aanic rhyme, rhythm, and eloquence the most comprehensive. Az-Zamakhsharee uses his mastery of the Arabic language to interpret the Qur'aan according to Mu'tazilee thought. Verses which conflict with his fundamentals are made allegorical and reinterpreted. His handling of legal issues is brief and unbiased, and he rarely uses *Israa'eeleeyaat.*[145]

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[144] See *at-Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon,* vol. 1, pp. 410-36.
[145] See *at -Tafseer wal-Mufassiroon,* vol. 1, pp. 437-89.

3

TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'AAN

The Qur'aan, the final discourse between God and man, was revealed in the language of the final Prophet (ﷺ), the language of the people among whom he was raised and by whom the last message was destined to be carried to the ends of the world. Allaah created man in a variety of colors and taught man diverse languages. Allaah, Most Wise, sent each of His messengers speaking the language of his people in order to facilitate the transmission of the divine message. This was clearly stated in the verse:

﴿ وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَا مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوۡمِهِۦ ﴾

"I never sent a messenger with other than his people's language."[1]

Consequently, all prophets were raised up from among their own people, even though they all carried the same basic message:

﴿ وَلَقَدۡ بَعَثۡنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٖ رَّسُولًا أَنِ ٱعۡبُدُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱجۡتَنِبُواْ ٱلطَّٰغُوتَ ﴾

"Verily, I have raised up in every nation a messenger saying: 'Worship Allaah and avoid false gods.' "[2]

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[1] *Soorah Ibraaheem* (14):4.
[2] *Soorah an-Nah̲l* (16):36.

Thus, in spite of the final message's universality, echoed in the verse,

﴿ قُلْ يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنِّى رَسُولُ ٱللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا ﴾

"Say: 'O mankind verily, I am Allaah's messenger (ﷺ) sent to all of you,' "[3]

and the verse,

﴿ وَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَـٰكَ إِلَّا كَآفَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا ﴾

"I have only sent you as a bringer of glad tidings and a warner for all mankind,"[4]

this message was revealed in the Arabic language.

The Islaamic state arose in the Arabian peninsula, engulfed it, and quickly spread to the neighboring lands of Africa, Asia Minor, India, and Asia. Arabic soon became not only the language of the final revelation of Islaam, but also the official language of a vast Islaamic empire encompassing diverse cultures and languages. Some of the people already spoke Arabic, while most did not. However, within a very short period, Islaam and Arabic spread rapidly among the people. Some foreign languages absorbed Arabic-Islaamic terms and those who spoke them began to write them in the Arabic script. Eventually, many of these languages were overshadowed or replaced by Arabic. The Coptic language of the Egyptians and Berber of the North Africans are some examples of the replacement of national languages by Arabic, while Hausa, Persian and Malay are examples of languages which absorbed large amounts of Arabic words and were written in Arabic script. In other areas, trading languages developed, made up of a mixture of local languages and large amounts of Arabic, but even these languages were written in Arabic script. However, when the 'Abbaasid caliphate weakened, Persian and Turkish warlords carved the state into a number of competing

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[3] *Soorah al-A'raaf* (7):158.
[4] *Soorah Saba'* (34):28.

sultanates. Persian was the language of government of many of these states.[5] Eventually leadership of the Muslim state fell into the hands of Mongols and, subsequently the Turks, a form of cultural nationalism arose in which the Turkish language became the official language of the state, and Arabic was de-emphasized, except in religious ceremonies and religious schools.[6] The famous *hadeeth* of the Prophet (ﷺ),

(مَنْ قَرَأَ حَرْفًا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ فَلَهُ بِهِ حَسَنَةٌ .)

"*Whoever reads a letter from Allaah's book earns a blessing,*"[7] took on new meaning. This statement was made to Arabic-speaking Muslims to encourage them to read as much of the Qur'aan as possible. The goal behind this encouragement was increased exposure to Allaah's message, and it was never intended to be the mere parroting of the vehicle in which it was brought. However, with the rise of Turkish cultural nationalism, there arose the concept of reading the letters and words of the Qur'aan simply for the blessing. Many students began memorizing the whole Qur'aan without understanding a word of what they had memorized. Parroting the Qur'aan became an accepted and highly regarded practice.

With the decline and break up of the Muslim state and the rise of European colonialism, the transitional process by which Muslim people's languages were evolving into Arabic was totally halted. Colonialists divided Muslim territories and required languages that had not completed the transition to Arabic to be written in Latin script. Examples of this attempt at reversal can be seen in the forced adoption of the Latin script by African languages, such as Hausa and Swahili; Middle Eastern languages, such as Turkish; and Asian languages, such as Malay.[8] Many of the Qur'aanic schools in which Arabic was taught were closed down or replaced by Christian schools, and the few schools which remained taught only the pronunciation of Arabic.

Consequently, the vast majority of Muslims remained unable to understand Arabic, even though many of them continued to read and pronounce its script. In

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[5] See *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 22, pp. 118-19.

[6] See *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 3, *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times*, pp.120-1.

[7] Collected by at-Tirmithee and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmithee*, vol. 3, p. 9, no. 2327. (See also *Riyadh-us-Saliheen*, vol. 2, p. 512, no. 999, for the English version.)

[8] See *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 29, pp. 851-2 and vol. 7, p. 728. See also *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 3, *The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times*, pp. 265-6, 327-8.

an attempt to fill this vacuum, some Muslim scholars in these non-Arabic speaking countries began to translate the Qur'aan into their local tongues. The earliest known translation of this type was by Shah 'Abdul Qaadir of Delhi (d. 1826 CE).[9] This movement to translation began to gather momentum around the latter part of the eighteenth century C.E.

However, these were not the earliest translations made into foreign languages. Before the evolution of modern European languages, Latin, the language of the Holy Roman Empire, was the language of culture in Europe. Hence, the earliest recorded translation was into Latin. It was made for the Monastery of Cluny in 1143, but it was not published until 1543 at Basle by Bibliander.[10] This Latin translation was subsequently translated into German by Schweigger in Bavaria in 1616, into French by DuRyer in Paris in 1647, and into Russian at St. Petersburg in 1776.[11] The first English translation, by A. Ross, was merely a translation of DuRyer's French translation, and was published a few years after DuRyer's.[12] During this period, Maracci, a confessor to Pope Innocent XI, produced another Latin translation in 1698, which included the Arabic text as well as quotations from various Arabic commentaries, carefully selected and garbled, in order to give Europeans the worst possible impression of Islaam. Maracci was a learned man, and his agenda was clear. He dedicated his work to the Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold I, and wrote an introductory volume for it entitled, "Refutation of the Quran."[13]

Among the most widely circulated English translations was that of George Sale, made in 1734. Sale translated from Maracci's Latin version and included his biased notes and introduction.[14] Other examples are that of Rev. J.M. Rodwell, published in 1876, in which the chapters were placed in a rough chronological order, and that of Professor E.H. Palmer, published in 1876.[15]

However, all of these translations contained a strong anti-Islaamic bias, either in their translated texts or in their introductions and footnotes. Consequently some Muslim scholars of India began the formidable task of accurately rendering the Qur'aan's meaning in English. The first to do so was Dr. Muhammad 'Abdul Hakeem Khan of Patiala in 1905. Unfortunately, this translation was followed in

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[9] 'Ali, 'Abdullah Yusuf, *The Holy Qur'aan*, p. xiv.
[10] Arberry, A.J., Preface of *The Koran Interpreted*, p.7.
[11] 'Ali, 'Abdullah Yusuf, *The Holy Qur'aan*, p. xiv.
[12] Preface of *The Koran Interpreted*, pp. 7, 10.
[13] 'Ali, 'Abdullah Yusuf, *The Holy Qur'aan*, p. xiv.
[14] Ibid., p. xiv.
[15] 'Ali, 'Abdullah Yusuf, *The Holy Qur'aan*, p.xv.

1917 by that of the Ahmadee scholar Maulvi Muhammad ‘Alee, which reflects the ideas of the Ahmadeeyah psuedo-Islaamic sect. Due to the strong missionary activity of the sect, their translation has, until recently, enjoyed a very wide circulation in the West. In 1919, Mirza Hairat of Delhi also published a translation, and Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar’s translation was published in 1929. However, neither of these was ever widely read.[16]

In 1930, the English scholar of Arabic, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, produced the first English translation by a Muslim convert. This scholar attempted what he termed an “almost literal translation” and included very few explanatory footnotes.[17] Nevertheless, his translation has become the second most widely received among Muslims.

Perhaps the most widely read English translation is that of ‘Abdullaah Yusuf ‘Ali, first published in Lahore in 1934. This is a rather free translation, in which the author, who received an education in the English classics, attempted to make a literary masterpiece capturing the beauty of the original. He provided summaries and profuse footnotes which, in a number of instances, included very unorthodox, if not heretical, opinions. A committee was formed in Saudi Arabia in 1980 to produce a reliable English translation of the Qur’aan. They chose ‘Abdullaah Yusuf ‘Ali’s as the best available, noting its “highly elegant style, a choice of words close to the meaning of the original text, accompanied by scholarly notes and commentaries.”[18] They recognized, however, that it had serious flaws, so they revised his translation here and there and made substantial revisions of his notes to remove his most glaring errors. This revised edition was published by the King Fahd Qur’aanic Printing Press in Madeenah in 1985.

Among the translations rejected by the Saudi review committee was that of the Austrian Muslim convert, Muhammad Asad. Its publication had been earlier considered but rejected by the Raabitah (Muslim World League) due to his marked leaning toward Mu‘tazilee (Rationalist) views.[19] Asad then went ahead

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[16] Ibid., p. xv.

[17] Pickthall, Muhammad Marmaduke, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran,* p. vii.

[18] Preface of *The Holy Qur’aan, English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary,* p. vi.

[19] He consistently explains away passages that mention miracles as being metaphorical, and he uses a similar approach to explain the passages which contain descriptions of Allaah. It isn’t surprising that he relies heavily on the opinions of Muhammad ‘Abduh. See *The Message of the Qur’an,* Foreword, p. *v*, footnote 4.

and published it on his own in 1980, and he reached an agreement with the prominent orientalist publisher, E.J. Brill, to distribute it.[20]

Another Muslim convert, Professor T.B. Irving, dissatisfied with the archaic language of both Pickthall and Yusuf 'Ali, produced "an American version in contemporary English," published in 1992.[21] It has a useful introduction about the problems of translating the Qur'aan into contemporary English. Very brief introductory notes for each chapter are gathered at the beginning of the book, but there is no commentary.

Professor Muhammad Taqi-ud Din Al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, both of the Islaamic University of Madeenah, published their *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an* in 1985. It is an attempt to summarize the commentaries of at-Tabaree, al-Qurtubee and Ibn Katheer by inserting additional material in parentheses into the translated text. Many Arabic terms, such as *faasiqoon, abraar, haneef,* are transliterated, with explanations of their meanings inserted after them in parentheses. Most of the footnotes consist of *hadeeths* from *Saheeh al-Bukhaaree* relevant to the verses they annotate. There is much that is useful in this work, but it is marred by repetitive insertions that disrupt sentence flow, making it linguistically clumsy. Also, because commentary is inserted into the flow of the sentences, readers unable to read Arabic may understand the added commentary to be an integral part of the original text. For instance, verse 157 of *Soorah an-Nisaa'* refutes the claim that Jesus was crucified:

﴿ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَـٰكِن شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ ﴾

> **"They neither killed nor crucified him, but it was made to appear so to them."**

However, as rendered in *The Noble Qur'an,* it reads: **"[But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but the resemblance of Jesus was put over another man (and they killed that man)..."**[22]

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[20] See *The Message of the Qur'an*, copyright information page.
[21] See T.B. Irving, *The Noble Qur'an*, p. xxxvii.
[22] M. Hilali and M. Khan, *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an*, p. 157.

The orientalists have also been active during this century and have produced other English translations; for example, R. Bell, Edinburgh, 1937-39; and A.J. Arberry, London, 1964. However, these translations have been shunned by Muslims now that sufficient Muslim works are available.

Types of Translation

The Qur'aan is more than the sum total of its words, grammatical constructions, figures of speech, rhythms, and rhymes. It is a message, a direct communication between God and man, and it is a permanent inimitable literary miracle. Neither the Arabs of the past nor the present were able to meet the open challenge concisely expressed in the verse:

﴿ وَإِن كُنتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّن مِّثْلِهِ ﴾

> **"And if you all are in doubt about what I have revealed to My servant, produce a single *soorah* like it."**[23]

and the verse:

﴿ أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ ۖ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ ﴾

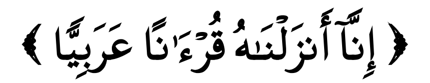
> **"Or do they say that he has invented it? Say to them, 'Produce a single *soorah* like it.' "**[24]

The Qur'aan cannot be translated; any attempt to do so is folly. Arabic grammatical constructions, figures of speech, rhyme, and rhythm cannot be expressed in other than Arabic. Besides, in translation the Qur'aan's inimitable quality is lost and its challenge becomes meaningless, for no translator, no matter how great his literary skills are, can claim inimitability. The Qur'aan cannot be

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[23] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):23.
[24] *Soorah Yoonus* (10):38.

literally translated because Arabic words often have more than one literal meaning, not to mention their figurative meanings. And, many Arabic constructions contain subtle shades of meanings which cannot be expressed in another language. No translation can be called or considered to be God's word. God's word is the Arabic Qur'aan, as He Himself said,



"Verily, I revealed it as an Arabic Qur'aan."[25]

Attempts to catch the charm of the Qur'aan in loose or free translations are also presumptuous, misleading, and doomed to failure. "The inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy"[26] exists only in the Arabic. Any degree of success will only dupe readers into thinking that they are experiencing the Qur'aan, whereas in reality, they are experiencing the feelings of the translator and his literary skills. Even claims to translations of the Qur'aan's meanings are false because the author of such translations chooses meanings which he feels are appropriate in the case of Arabic words which have more than one meaning and words which have no non-Arabic equivalent. He also chooses between literal and figurative meanings and translates the one which he considers appropriate. All translations are in fact *tafseers*, some more accurate than others. Most translations list in their forewords the names of the classical *tafseers* and lexicons on which they relied. This may seem to be a very fine point, but if it were put in another way perhaps the difference would be more obvious. The *mufassir* speaks in an explanatory way as if to say: "This is what I understand from the verse." The translator speaks as if he has completely understood the verse's meaning and translated it as if to say: "This is what the verse means." The difference between the two approaches is quite vast. Hence, translators should emphasize in their prefaces and titles the fact that this is their personal understanding of the Qur'aan. Perhaps the best approach for a translator would be to simply translate the basic text of the classical *tafseers* using footnotes to explain other possible meanings and the context of the passages where necessary. This is not to say that existing "translations" are of no value whatsoever and that those who do not understand the Arabic should stop reading them. Existing

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[25] *Soorah Yoosuf* (12):2.
[26] Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran,* p. vii.

"translations" serve to convey the basic message of the Qur'aan to those who cannot get it from the Qur'aan themselves. However, the reader should bear in mind that what he or she is reading is not a translation of the Qur'aan or all of its meaning, but only an explanation in another language. Learning Arabic to whatever degree possible should be among the goals of all Muslims in order that they may hear Allaah's words exactly as they were revealed.

4

THE QUR'AAN: THE UNIQUE BOOK

The word "Qur'aan," a verbal noun, is equivalent in meaning to *"qiraa'ah,"* as both come from the verb *"qara'a"* which means "to read." That is, Qur'aan literally means "a reading or reciting."[27] However, the term "Qur'aan" has been historically used specifically to refer to the book which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The term "Qur'aan" is mentioned in a number of places throughout the book in reference to itself. For example:

﴿ إِنَّ هَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانَ يَهْدِى لِلَّتِى هِىَ أَقْوَمُ ﴾

"Verily, this Qur'aan guides (humanity) to that which is most just."[28]

The name Qur'aan is used to refer to both the Qur'aan as a whole, as in the previously quoted verse; as well as to each verse or group of verses, as in the following verse:

﴿ وَإِذَا قُرِئَ ٱلْقُرْءَانُ فَٱسْتَمِعُوا۟ لَهُۥ وَأَنصِتُوا۟ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٢٠٤﴾ ﴾

"And if the Qur'aan is recited, you should listen to it and be silent, that you may receive mercy."[29]

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[27] *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2, p. 2502.
[28] *Soorah al-Israa'* (17):9.
[29] *Soorah al-A'raaf* (7):204.

The Book has also been referred to by other names; for example, the *Furqaan* (The Distinction):

﴿ تَبَارَكَ ٱلَّذِى نَزَّلَ ٱلْفُرْقَانَ عَلَىٰ عَبْدِهِۦ لِيَكُونَ لِلْعَـٰلَمِينَ نَذِيرًا ﴿١﴾ ﴾

> **"Blessed is He who revealed the *Furqaan* to His slave in order that he may be a warner to all the worlds."**[30]

and the *Thikr,* (The Reminder):

﴿ إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا ٱلذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُۥ لَحَـٰفِظُونَ ﴿٩﴾ ﴾

> **"Verily, I revealed the *Thikr* and verily I will preserve it."**[31]

The Qur'aan could be defined as Allaah's words which were revealed in Arabic in a rhythmical form to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Its recitation is used in acts of worship and its smallest chapter (*soorah*) is of a miraculous nature.

The Prophet's divinely inspired statements which were recorded by his followers are generally referred to as *hadeeths.* For example, the Prophet's companion (*sahaabee*), 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab, reported that he once said,

(إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّةِ)

"*Verily, deeds are (judged) by their intentions.*"[32]

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[30] *Soorah al-Furqaan* (25):1

[31] *Soorah al-Hijr* (15):9.

[32] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, p. 1, no. 1) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 1056, no. 4692).

However, in some of his statements, the Prophet (ﷺ) attributed what he said to Allaah; for example, another *sahaabee*, Aboo Hurayrah, reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

(يَقُولُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى : أَنَا عِنْدَ ظَنِّ عَبْدِي بِي وَأَنَا مَعَهُ إِذَا ذَكَرَنِي فَإِنْ ذَكَرَنِي فِي نَفْسِهِ ذَكَرْتُهُ فِي نَفْسِي وَإِنْ ذَكَرَنِي فِي مَلاَ ذَكَرْتُهُ فِي مَلاَ خَيْرٍ مِنْهُمْ .)

"*Allaah, Most High, says, 'I am as My slave thinks of Me and I am with him when he remembers me. So if he remembers Me to himself, I will remember him to Myself and if he remembers Me in a group, I will remember him in a better group.'* "[33]

In order to distinguish this type of *hadeeth* from the previous type, it is referred to as *hadeeth qudsee* (sacred *hadeeth*) and the former referred to as *hadeeth nabawee* (prophetic *hadeeth*).

The Qur'aan, however, is not the same as *hadeeth qudsee* for a number of reasons. First, the Qur'aan is from Allaah both in its wording and in its meaning, while in the case of *hadeeth qudsee,* its meaning is from Allaah but its wording was the Prophet's (ﷺ). Second, Allaah challenged the Arabs and mankind in general to produce even a chapter equivalent to one of the Qur'aan's chapters, and their inability to do so proves its miraculous nature. This is not so in the case of *hadeeth qudsee.* Third, the recitation of the Qur'aan is used in *salaah* and is itself considered a form of worship. The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

(مَنْ قَرَأَ حَرْفًا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ فَلَهُ بِهِ حَسَنَةٌ وَالْحَسَنَةُ بِعَشْرِ أَمْثَالِهَا لاَ أَقُولُ الم حَرْفٌ وَلَكِنْ أَلِفٌ حَرْفٌ وَلاَمٌ حَرْفٌ وَمِيمٌ حَرْفٌ .)

"*Whoever reads a letter from the book of Allaah, the Most High, will get a good deed (recorded for him), and each good deed is worth ten times its value. I am not only saying that* Alif Laam Meem *is a letter, but I am also saying that* Alif *is a letter,* Laam *is a letter, and* Meem *is a letter.*"[34]

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[33] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 9, pp. 369-70, no. 502) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1408, no. 6471).

[34] Reported by Ibn Mas'ood and collected by at-Tirmithee and Ahmad. See footnote 154, p.75.

However, the recitation of *hadeeth qudsee* carries none of these properties.[35]

The Main Theme

Not only is the Qur'aan unique among books today in its origin and purity, but it is also unique in the way it presents its subject matter. It is not a book in the usual sense of the word wherein there is an introduction, explanation of the subject, followed by a conclusion. Neither is it restricted to only a presentation of historical events, problems of philosophy, facts of science or social laws, though all may be found woven together in it without any apparent connection and links. Subjects are introduced without background information, historical events are not presented in chronological order, new topics sometimes crop up in the middle of another for no apparent reason, and the speaker and those spoken to change direction without the slightest forewarning.

The reader who is unaware of the Qur'aan's uniqueness is often puzzled when he finds it contrary to his understanding of a book in general and a "religious" book in particular. Hence, the Qur'aan may seem disorganized and haphazard to him. However, to those who understand its subject matter, aim and its central theme, the Qur'aan is exactly the opposite. The subject matter of the Qur'aan is essentially man: man in relation to his Lord and Creator, Allaah; man in relation to himself; and man in relation to the rest of creation. The aim and object of the revelations is to invite man to the right way of dealing with his Lord, with himself, and with creation. Hence, the main theme that runs throughout the Qur'aan is that God alone deserves worship and, thus, man should submit to God's laws in his personal life and in his relationships with creation in general. Or, in other words, the main theme is a call to the belief in Allaah and the doing of righteous deeds as defined by Allaah.

If the reader keeps these basic facts in mind, he will find that, from beginning to end, the Qur'aan's topics are all closely connected to its main theme and that the whole book is a well-reasoned and cohesive argument for its theme. The Qur'aan keeps the same object in view, whether it is describing the creation of man and the universe or events from human history. Since the aim of the Qur'aan is to guide man, it states or discusses things only to the extent relevant to this aim and leaves out unnecessary and irrelevant details. It also repeats its main theme over and over again in the presentation of each new topic.

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[35] See *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 15, and *Qawaa'id at-Tahdeeth min Funoon Mustalih al-Hadeeth*, p. 56.

In the preface of one of the best orientalist translations of the Qur'aan, the translator, Arthur John Arberry, writes: "There is a repertory of familiar themes running through the whole Koran; each Sura[36] elaborates or adumbrates[37] one or more—often many—of these. Using the language of music, each Sura is a rhapsody composed of whole or fragmentary *leitmotivs*;[38] the analogy is reinforced by the subtly varied rhythmical flow of the discourse."[39]

The following four principles should be kept in mind by the new reader of the Qur'aan if he or she is to avoid unnecessary confusion and disorientation:

1. The book is the only one of its type in the world.
2. Its literary style is quite different from all other books.
3. Its theme is unique.
4. Preconceived notions of a book are only a hindrance to the understanding of the Qur'aan.[40]

THE MIRACLE OF THE QUR'AAN

Man has a natural distaste towards submitting to another man unless he is forced to by the latter's physical strength or his mental superiority, or if he is shown feats far beyond the abilities of any man. In the first two cases, he yields reluctantly, while in the third, he yields because of his belief in a higher force or power defying all human comparison. Therefore, Allaah favored His messengers not only with revelation, but also with miracles, clearly proving to the people the divine origin and truthfulness of their messages. The inability of the people to imitate the miracles of the prophets made them willingly bear witness to Allaah's unity and obey the commandments of the prophets.

Due to the difficulties involved in communication and transportation, the early prophets were sent only to the people among whom they were raised up.

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[36] Qur'aanic chapter.
[37] Indicate faintly or in outline.
[38] Recurring features.
[39] *The Koran Interpreted,* p. 28.
[40] These four statements are quoted from Abu'l A'la Maududi in *The Meaning of the Qur'aan*, vol. 1, p. 7.

Thus, the miracles which they brought were particularly suited to the areas of knowledge in which their people excelled in order for the miracles to have the maximum effect on them. For example, Prophet Moosaa (Moses), may Allaah's peace be on him, was raised up among the Egyptians, who were noted for their mastery of the occult arts, sorcery, and magic. Hence, Allaah gave him the miracle of being able to place his hand in his cloak and extract a brilliantly shining hand. And when sorcerers and magicians were gathered to challenge Prophet Moosaa, and the staffs which they had cast appeared to the audience as snakes, Allaah turned Prophet Moosaa's staff into a huge, real snake that devoured the "snakes" of his opponents. That defeat was sufficient proof for the magicians and sorcerers, who knew that no one could change the nature of a stick as Moosaa apparently had done. They fell on their faces in submission and sincere belief in the God of Moosaa, in spite of the threats on their lives uttered by their master, the Pharaoh.

Another example is that of Prophet 'Eesaa (Jesus), who was chosen by Allaah from among the Jews. The Jews were especially noted for their exceptional abilities in the field of medicine. Jewish doctors were highly respected and revered for their seemingly magical ability to mend bones, heal wounds, and cure the sick. Thus, Allaah favored Prophet 'Eesaa with the miraculous ability to make the blind see, the lame walk, and to bring the dead back to life. These abilities were clearly beyond those of the Jewish doctors of that day, and they knew well that no regular man could do them. Yet, Allaah gave Prophet 'Eesaa an even more dazzling miracle: he was able to mold birds out of clay, breathe on them, and they would fly away.

Since the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was to be the last of the prophets sent not only to a particular people, but to all of mankind, he was given a miracle which not only amazed people among whom he was raised, but which would challenge and amaze the human mind until the last days of this world. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), like the other prophets before him, was given a number of other miracles whose effects were basically limited to the people of his time; for example, the splitting of the moon upon his tribe's request for a sign, the outpouring of water from his hands on one occasion when he and his companions were short of water, and the phenomenon of pebbles and rocks giving *salaams* to him (i.e., greeting him with the phrase: "*as-salaamu 'alaykum,*" meaning, "peace be on you"), just

to mention a few.[41] However, the miracle of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) which was consistent with Allaah's aid to the prophets before him was a literary miracle.

The Arabs had very little in the way of unique skills or accumulated knowledge, but they took great pride in their oratory and literary skills. Yearly contests were held in fairs like that of 'Ukkaath, in which many lines of speeches and poetry were recited from memory. Their language had reached its peak of development, and eloquence was considered the highest quality a man could possess. In fact, the ten most famous poems were so revered that they were etched in gold and hung in the *Ka'bah* for solemn adoration.[42] Consequently, Allaah revealed to His last prophet a book, beginning some parts with unintelligible letters like, "*Alif Laam Meem*" or "*Qaaf*" or "*Noon,*" tantalizing the Arab mind, as if to say, "From these letters which you combine to form your daily conversations, as well as great works of prose and poetry, is formed a book whose shortest chapter does not exceed three lines, yet you cannot imitate it, no matter how hard you try!" Thus, his standing miracle was none other then the Qur'aan itself, as the Prophet (ﷺ) himself stated,

(مَا مِنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ نَبِيٌّ إِلاَّ أُعْطِيَ مَا مِثْلُهُ آمَنَ عَلَيْهِ الْبَشَرُ وَإِنَّمَا كَانَ الَّذِي أُوتِيتُ وَحْيًا أَوْحَاهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيَّ فَأَرْجُو أَنْ أَكُونَ أَكْثَرَهُمْ تَابِعًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ .)

"*All prophets were given something which would cause people to believe in them. The thing which I was given is none other than a revelation (the Qur'aan) which Allaah revealed to me. So I hope that I will have the most followers among them on the Day of Judgment.*"[43]

The Challenge

The Qur'aan is not only unique in the way in which it presents it subject matter, but it is also unique in that it is a miracle itself. By the term "miracle," we mean the performance of a supernatural or extraordinary event which cannot be duplicated by humans. It has been documented that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

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[41] See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 5, p. 336, no. 473; vol. 6, p. 365, no. 387; and *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1230, no. 5654.

[42] See *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, pp. 277-8.

[43] Reported by Aboo Hurayrah and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 474, no. 504) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 90-1, no. 283).

challenged the Arabs to produce a literary work of a similar caliber as the Qur’aan, but they were unable to do so in spite of their well-known eloquence and literary powers. The challenge to reproduce the Qur’aan was presented to the Arabs and mankind in three stages:

1. The Whole Qur’aan:

In the Qur’aan, Allaah commanded the Prophet (ﷺ) to challenge all of creation to create a book of the stature of the Qur’aan,

﴿ قُل لَّئِنِ ٱجۡتَمَعَتِ ٱلۡإِنسُ وَٱلۡجِنُّ عَلَىٰٓ أَن يَأۡتُواْ بِمِثۡلِ هَٰذَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانِ لَا يَأۡتُونَ بِمِثۡلِهِۦ وَلَوۡ كَانَ بَعۡضُهُمۡ لِبَعۡضٖ ظَهِيرٗا ٨٨ ﴾

> **“Say: ‘If all mankind and the *jinn* would come together to produce the like of this Qur’aan, they could not produce its like even though they exerted all their strength in aiding one another.’ ”**[44]

2. Ten *Soorahs:*

Next, Allaah made the challenge ostensibly easier by asking those who denied its divine origin to imitate even ten *soorahs* of the Qur’aan:

﴿ أَمۡ يَقُولُونَ ٱفۡتَرَىٰهُۖ قُلۡ فَأۡتُواْ بِعَشۡرِ سُوَرٖ مِّثۡلِهِۦ مُفۡتَرَيَٰتٖ وَٱدۡعُواْ مَنِ ٱسۡتَطَعۡتُم مِّن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمۡ صَٰدِقِينَ ١٣ ﴾

> **“Or do they say that he has invented it? Say (to them), ‘Bring ten invented *soorahs* like it, and call (for help) on whomever you can beside Allaah, if you are truthful.’ ”**[45]

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[44] *Soorah al-Israa’* (17):88.
[45] *Soorah Hood* (11):13.

This final challenge was to produce even a single *soorah* to match what is in the Qur'aan, whose shortest *soorah, al-Kawthar,* consists of only three verses:

﴿ وَإِن كُنتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّن مِّثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُم مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾ ﴾

"And if you all are in doubt about what I have revealed to My servant, bring a single *soorah* like it, and call your witnesses besides Allaah if you are truthful."[46]

These challenges were not just empty words with no one caring to prove them wrong. Prophet Mu<u>h</u>ammad's (ﷺ) call to monotheism, to the abolition of idolatry in all its forms, and to the equality of slaves and their masters threatened the whole socio-economic framework of Makkan society in general, and the position of the ruling Qurayshee tribe from which the Prophet (ﷺ) came in particular. Makkah, the trading center of Arabia, as well as its spiritual center, desperately wanted to stop the spread of Islaam. Yet all that the Prophet's opponents had to do to crush the movement was to make up a single *soorah* like any one of those which the Prophet (ﷺ) and his followers were reciting to the people. A number of Qurayshee orators and poets tried to imitate the Qur'aan, but they failed. They then resorted to offering him vast amounts of wealth, the position of king over them, and the most noble and beautiful of their women in exchange for his promise to stop inviting people to Islaam. He responded to them by reciting the first thirteen verses of *Soorah Fu<u>ss</u>ilat*, until they asked him to stop.[47] The Quraysh also resorted to torturing their slaves and relatives who had embraced Islaam in a vain attempt to cause them to revert to paganism. Later they organized an economic boycott against the Prophet (ﷺ), his followers and the members of his clan, Banoo Haashim, in an attempt to starve them into submission. But even this plan eventually failed. Finally, they plotted to kill him

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[46] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):23

[47] Collected by al-<u>H</u>aakim, al-Bayhaqee, Aboo Ya'laa and Ibn Hishaam, and declared *<u>h</u>asan* by Ibraaheem al-'Alee in *<u>S</u>a<u>h</u>ee<u>h</u> as-Seerah an-Nabaweeyah*, p.64.

in his home by sending armed young men from each of the clans of Quraysh in order that the guilt of his murder be shared by all the clans, making revenge by the Prophet's clan impossible.

However, Allaah enabled the Prophet (ﷺ) and his followers to flee Makkah and join a new band of converts who had arisen among the tribes of a city to the north called Yathrib. Islaam spread rapidly through the clans of Yathrib, and within a year Muslims became the city's majority. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was then made the ruler, and the name of the city was changed to Madeenah. Over the next eight years, the clans of Makkah and its neighboring lands mounted a series of unsuccessful battle campaigns against the emerging Muslim state in Madeenah, which ended with the Muslim invasion of Makkah itself.

All of this bloodshed could have been avoided if only the Quraysh and their allies had been able to produce a mere three lines of poetry or flowing prose similar to the shortest *soorah* of the Qur'aan. Hence, there can be no doubt about the inimitability of the Qur'aan's literary style, about the miracle of its rhyme and the marvel of its rhythm.

It has been suggested that the inimitability of the Qur'aan is not necessarily unique, for great English poets like Shakespeare, Chaucer, or great poets in any language tend to have distinctly unique styles which set them apart from their contemporaries. However, if, for example, some leading poet of today were to make an in-depth study of Shakespeare's writings and write a sonnet in Shakespeare's style in old ink and on old paper, then claim that he had discovered a lost poem of Shakespeare's, the literary world would probably accept this claim, even after careful study. Thus, even the greatest of poets could be imitated, no matter how unique his style was, just as the famous painters have been imitated.[48] The Qur'aan, however, is way above this level, as attempts to forge chapters have been made throughout the ages, yet none has withstood close scrutiny. And, as was mentioned before, the incentive to imitate the Qur'aan was more intense during the time of its revelation when literary skills were at their peak than at any other time, yet there was no successful attempt.

Other Aspects of the Qur'aan's miraculous nature

[48] In fact, some English scholars consider much of what has been attributed to Shakespeare to have been written by his contemporary, Christopher Marlowe.

For a scripture to qualify as divinely revealed it must be totally accurate in its descriptions of reality: the past, the present and the future. The Qur'aan has many stories about previous prophets and their peoples. Some of these stories have elements in them that can be checked out for their accuracy.

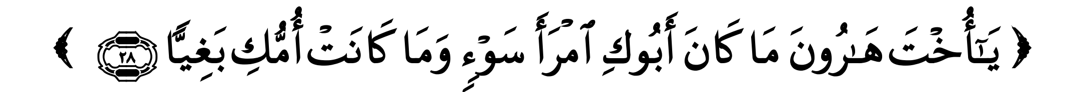
One example of the Qur'aan's precision in its historical descriptions is in the story of Prophet Yoosuf (Joseph), who was sold as a slave in Egypt, but rose to become an important official in the government, which made it possible for him to bring his whole family to live there in honor. Most historians agree that the entry of the Children of Israel into Egypt occurred when the northern half of the country was ruled by the Hyksos, Semitic invaders who were the first non-Egyptians to rule that country since the rise of the Old Kingdom. The Qur'aan always calls the Egyptian ruler who confronted Moses by the title of "Pharaoah." Every Egyptian ruler was called by this title starting from the reign of Amenhotep IV in the 14th century BC, but not before that. Yoosuf lived at least two hundred years before Amenhotep IV. The Qur'aan consistently refers to the ruler in Yoosuf's time, as *"al-malik,"* the king:

﴿ وَقَالَ ٱلۡمَلِكُ ٱئۡتُونِي بِهِۦ ﴾

"The king said, 'Bring him to me.' "[49]

It should be noted that the Bible refers to the ruler of Joseph's time as "Pharaoah," which was an anachronism inserted by the scribes who wrote the books of the Old Testament centuries after Moses.[50]

Some critics have seized on certain details to try attack the Qur'aan's historical accuracy. A famous example is the statement of her people to Mary (Ar. Maryam) when she appeared with the baby Jesus after giving birth to him in an isolated place:



[49] *Soorah Yoosuf* (12):50.
[50] *Moses and Pharaoah: The Hebrews in Egypt*, p. 176.

"O sister of Aaron! Your father was not an evil man nor was your mother a prostitute!"[51]

The critics argue that the author confused two historical figures: Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Miriam, the sister of Aaron. The confusion here is really a result of their ignorance about how the Arabs use their language. The Qur'aan refers to Prophet Hood as the brother of 'Aad:

﴿ وَٱذۡكُرۡ أَخَا عَادٍ إِذۡ أَنذَرَ قَوۡمَهُۥ بِٱلۡأَحۡقَافِ ﴾

"And mention the brother of 'Aad when he warned his people among the sand dunes."[52]

The Arabs refer to tribes by the patriarch from whom they are descended. The tribe of 'Aad was descended from a man named 'Aad. Hood was not literally that man's brother, nor was he literally the brother of every member of his tribe, but this is an expression used by the Arabs to indicate association with a people. Mary was a descendant of Aaron. That is why she is referred to as the sister of Aaron. In a similar usage, the New Testament refers to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist as a daughter of Aaron.[53]

Predictions about the Future

The Qur'aan accurately predicted the military victory of the Romans (Byzantines) over the Persians:

﴿ غُلِبَتِ ٱلرُّومُ ۝٢ فِيٓ أَدۡنَى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَهُم مِّنۢ بَعۡدِ غَلَبِهِمۡ سَيَغۡلِبُونَ ۝٣ فِي بِضۡعِ سِنِينَ ﴾

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[51] *Soorah Maryam* (19):28.
[52] *Soorah al-Ahqaaf* (46):21.
[53] Luke 1:5.

The Romans have been defeated in the nearest land; and after their defeat they will conquer, within a few years."[54]

The Arabic word *bi<u>d</u>'* is more precise than the English word "few." *Bi<u>d</u>'* is used for a number between three and ten. The Persians dealt the Romans a crushing defeat in the year 616 CE, taking away Greater Syria and Egypt from them and eventually besieging them in their capital of Constantinople. In 622 CE, the Byzantines won a decisive victory against the Persians at the battle of Issus, which allowed them to regain all the lands they had lost.[55]

The Qur'aan also accurately predicted that the Muslims would be able to enter Makkah peacefully in order to make

'umrah, the Lesser Pilgrimage.[56] The prediction came in the middle of a long bitter war between the Muslims and the idol worshippers who ruled Makkah. It also promised the Muslims that if they fulfilled the conditions of complete faith and good deeds that Allaah would deputize them to rule the world and would establish their religion and replace the fear they were currently living in with security.[57] That is precisely what happened.

Descriptions of Natural Phenomena

The Qur'aan calls the reader's attention to numerous natural phenomena that are indicators of Allaah's power, wisdom, mercy, etc. As humanity's understanding of the workings of the natural has increased, the miraculous nature of these Qur'aanic descriptions has become manifest. This is not the forum for a detailed discussion of this issue, but a few examples are mentioned by way of illustration.



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[54] *Soorah ar-Room* (30):2-4

[55] See *The Holy Qur-an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, pp. 1202-3.

[56] *Soorah al-Fat-<u>h</u>* (48):27.

[57] *Soorah an-Noor* (24):55.

“The heaven I created by might, and, verily, I am expanding it.[58]

The Arabic word *moos‘ioon* is an active participle. It indicates an ongoing action that is occurring at the present time and will continue into the future. It was not until the invention of the spectrograph and the development of a huge (100 in. diameter) reflecting telescope that Edward Hubble was able to discover other galaxies in 1926 and to document in 1927 the red shift of their spectra that indicates they are moving away from ours. The Encyclopaedia Britannica says about this: “The implications of this discovery were immense. The universe, **long considered static, was expanding**.”[59]

Allaah says in *Soorah an-Noor:*

﴿ أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُزْجِى سَحَابًا ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيْنَهُۥ ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُۥ رُكَامًا فَتَرَى ٱلْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَٰلِهِۦ وَيُنَزِّلُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مِن جِبَالٍ فِيهَا مِنۢ بَرَدٍ فَيُصِيبُ بِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ وَيَصْرِفُهُۥ عَن مَّن يَشَآءُ ﴾

“Have you not seen how Allaah makes the clouds move gently, then joins them together, then makes them a heap? And you see raindrops issuing from their midst. He sends down hail from the sky from mountains of hail therein, causing it to fall on whom he wills and averting it from whom he wills.”[60]

Gulf News of Friday, May 30th, 1997 carried the following item:

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[58] *Soorah ath-Thaariyaat* (51):47.
[59] *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 6, p. 114.
[60] *Soorah an-Noor* (24):43.

> Earth is bathed by a steady “cosmic rain” of previously undetected objects from outer space that pour vast quanti-ties of water into the atmosphere, according to startling new evidence released Wednesday.
>
> The objects, 20- to 40-ton snowballs the size of two-bedroom houses, streak into the atmosphere by the thousands each day, disintegrate harmlessly 600 to 15,000 miles up and deposit large clouds of water vapor that eventually falls on Earth’s surface as rain, according to Louis A. Frank of the University of Iowa. He led the research team that for the first time has captured images of these objects...taken at both ultraviolet and visible wavelengths by Frank’s specially designed instrument aboard NASA’s year old Polar spacecraft.[61]

These examples are just the “tip of the iceberg.” There are other remarkably accurate statements about oceanography, geology, cosmogony, physics, biology, embryology, etymology, hydrology and other subjects.[62]

Contradictions in the Qur’aan

The Qur’aan challenges its readers to find any errors in it if they do not believe it is really from God.

﴿ أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ ۚ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِندِ غَيْرِ ٱللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا۟ فِيهِ ٱخْتِلَـٰفًا كَثِيرًا ﴿٨٢﴾ ﴾

“Will they not consider the Qur’aan carefully? Had it been from other than Allaah, they would have found many contradictions in it.”[63]

The few apparent “contradictions” commonly mentioned by critics are easily explained.

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[61] *Gulf News*, Friday, May 30th, 1997, p. 10.
[62] For further reading, see *The Qur’aan and Modern Science,* by Maurice Bucaille and *The Amazing Qur’an*, by Gary Miller.
[63] *Soorah an-Nisaa’* (4):82.

Case One:

One critic writes: "Calling together or ripping apart? In the process of creation, heaven and earth were first apart and are called to come together [41:11], while 21:30 states they were originally one piece and then ripped apart."

First let us look at the text of each verse. Verse 30 of *Soorah al-Ambiyaa'* states:

﴿ أَوَلَمْ يَرَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَـٰهُمَا ﴾

"Have not those who disbelieved known that the heavens and the earth were joined together, then I split them apart?

On the other hand, verses 11 and 12 of *Soorah Fu*<u>*ss*</u>*ilat* say:

﴿ ثُمَّ ٱسْتَوَىٰٓ إِلَى ٱلسَّمَآءِ وَهِىَ دُخَانٌ فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ ٱئْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا قَالَتَآ أَتَيْنَا طَآئِعِينَ ﴿١١﴾ فَقَضَىٰهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَـٰوَاتٍ فِى يَوْمَيْنِ وَأَوْحَىٰ فِى كُلِّ سَمَآءٍ أَمْرَهَا ﴾

"And[64] He turned to the heaven, when it was smoke and said to it and the earth: 'Come, both of you willingly or unwillingly!'—to which both responded, 'We come in obedience.' And He decreed that they

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[64] The Arabic word is *thumma*. It is a conjunction which generally indicates an order of events but at other times is used for a more abstract ordering. Mu<u>h</u>ammad Asad understood it not to be ordinal here, so he translated it as 'and.' See *Diyaa' as-Saalik ilaa Aw*<u>*d*</u>*a*<u>*h*</u> *al-Masaalik* for an explanation of the meanings and usage of *thumma*. See the Qur'aan, 2:198-9 and 6:154 for other examples of its nonordinal usage.

become seven heavens in two periods of time, and imparted unto each heaven its function."

It is surprising that a critic educated in an American university would find a contradiction between these two verses, considering that the dominant theory of cosmogony taught in such universities is the Big Bang theory. According to astronomers and physicists, all the matter in the universe emerged from a state of extremely high density and temperature, which then split apart in an explosion that led to a rapid decrease in temperature and density. This allowed for the formation of certain atomic nuclei. They say that after a million years the universe was sufficiently cool for hydrogen and helium atoms to form. After a few hundred million years, fluctuations in density in the expanding gas cloud led to an eventual separation into galaxies. Clouds of gas in the galaxies then pulled together to form individual stars.[65] This model envisions two stages in the process of creation. The first is an unimaginably dense solid mass. The second is an expanding cloud of high energy particles which eventually cooled enough to be called a gas cloud, from which the galaxies formed.

The two Qur'aanic passages cited by this critic describe two stages in the history of the universe. Neither passage explicitly indicates which state came first, but it is not far-fetched to suppose that there was an original compacted mass that was split asunder, which led to a gaseous ("smoke") stage, from which the heavens then became differentiated.

Case Two:

The same critic writes: "What was man created from? A blood clot [96:1-2], water [21:30, 24:45, 25:54], 'sounding' (i.e. burned) clay [15:26], dust [3:59, 30:20, 35:11], nothing [19:67] and this is then denied in 52:35, earth [11:61], a drop of thickened fluid [16:4, 75:37]."

Let us look at the verses cited:

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[65] See *The New Encylopaedia Britannica*, vol. 16, pp. 776-7. Of course, this scenario is highly speculative, but there are some observable features of physical reality that support the broad outlines of the theaory.

﴿ أَوَلَا يَذْكُرُ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَٰهُ مِن قَبْلُ وَلَمْ يَكُ شَيْـًٔا ﴿٦٧﴾ ﴾

“Doesn’t the human being remember that I created him before, when he was nothing.”[66]

﴿ أَمْ خُلِقُوا۟ مِنْ غَيْرِ شَىْءٍ أَمْ هُمُ ٱلْخَٰلِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ ﴾

“Were they created from nothing or were they themselves the creators?”[67]

﴿ وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ ٱلْمَآءِ كُلَّ شَىْءٍ حَىٍّ ﴾

“And I created every living thing from water.”[68]

﴿ وَٱللَّهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ دَآبَّةٍ مِّن مَّآءٍ ﴾

“And Allaah created every crawling creature from water.”[69]

﴿ وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ مِنَ ٱلْمَآءِ بَشَرًا ﴾

“And He it is who created the human being from water.”[70]

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[66] *Soorah Maryam* (19):67.
[67] *Soorah at-Toor* (52):35.
[68] *Soorah al-Ambiyaa’* (21):30.
[69] *Soorah an-Noor* (24):45.
[70] *Soorah al-Furqaan* (25):54.

﴿ وَلَقَدۡ خَلَقۡنَا ٱلۡإِنسَـٰنَ مِن صَلۡصَـٰلٍ مِّنۡ حَمَإٍ مَّسۡنُونٍ ﴿٢٦﴾ ﴾

"And, indeed, I have created the human being out of sounding clay, out of dark, smooth mud transmuted."[71]

﴿ هُوَ أَنشَأَكُم مِّنَ ٱلۡأَرۡضِ ﴾

"He (Allaah) brought you forth from the earth."[72]

﴿ وَمِنۡ ءَايَـٰتِهِۦۤ أَنۡ خَلَقَكُم مِّن تُرَابٍ ﴾

"And among His signs is that He created you from dust."[73]

﴿ ٱقۡرَأۡ بِٱسۡمِ رَبِّكَ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ ٱلۡإِنسَـٰنَ مِنۡ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾ ﴾

"Read in the name of your Lord who has created—created the human being from a clinging thing."[74]

﴿ أَلَمۡ يَكُ نُطۡفَةً مِّن مَّنِىٍّ يُمۡنَىٰ ﴿٣٧﴾ ﴾

"Was he not a drop of fluid that gushed forth?"[75]

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[71] *Soorah al-Hijr* (15):26. The term '*salsaal*' used in this verse means 'clay mixed with sand, which, when dried makes a sound' (i.e., when it is struck.). *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2 , p. 1711.

[72] *Soorah Hood* (11):61.

[73] *Soorah Room* (30):20.

[74] *Soorah al-'Alaq* (96:1-2). The word ''*alaq*' is more accurately translated as 'a clinging thing' rather than 'a blood clot' in this context.

[75] *Soorah al-Qiyaamah* (75):37.

﴿ خَلَقَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ مِن نُّطۡفَةٖ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٞ مُّبِينٞ ٤ ﴾

"He created the human being from a drop of fluid, then, behold, he becomes an open opponent."[76]

The perception of contradiction here is a result of confusion between metaphysics, chemistry and biology, and between different stages of the process of biological creation. The first two verses above are dealing with creation in metaphysical terms. In the first verse, Allaah reminds human beings that He created them and all of creation ultimately from nothing, which is one of His most sublime attributes. In the second verse, He poses a rhetorical question to highlight the untenable implication of atheism, "If you deny the existence of God, then do you believe that nothingness brought you into existence?" Therefore, there is no contradiction between these two verses.

The next three verses state that all living creatures, including those that crawl and human beings, are created from water. This is a biological fact that no one denies. All living creatures have water-based physiologies.

The next set of verses state that the human being was created from dust and clay and was brought forth from the earth. There are two acceptable *tafseers* for these verses. One is that they refer to Aadam, the ancestor of mankind. The other is that they refer to the chemical composition of every human being. The elements of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, etc. are present in the earth. Through photosynthesis these elements are transformed into vegetable matter, which human beings consume directly or by eating the flesh of animals that have consumed plants. The source of all living creatures is thus, ultimately, the earth, or, by another expression, the dust of the earth, which when combined with water is called 'clay.'

The rest of the verses refer to the biological aspects of human creation. The word *nutfah* is commonly used to refer to male seminal fluid, but it is also linguistically possible to use it to refer to the female reproductive fluids. The fertilized zygote is referred to in the Qur'aan as *nutfah amshaaj*, that is, 'a mingled fluid'.[77] In a *hadeeth,* the word *nutfah* is explicitly used to refer to the

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[76] *Soorah an-Nahl* (16):4.

[77] *Soorah al-Insaan* (76):2. There is a wonderful subtlety in this expression that puzzled early commentators; the word *nutfah* is a singular noun, while *amshaaj*, the adjective that modifies it, is a plural. Normally, the adjective must agree with the noun it modifies in number, gender and case.

fluid of the woman. It was reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) was asked from what the human being was created, and that he replied,

(مِنْ كُلٍّ يُخْلَقُ ، مِنْ نُطْفَةِ الرَّجُلِ ، وَمِنْ نُطْفَةِ الْمَرْأَةِ)

"*He is created from both the* nuṯfah *of the man and the* nuṯfah *of the woman.*"[78]

After fertilization, the embryo implants itself in the uterine wall. It is at this stage that it is called an *'alaq* in Arabic.[79] Therefore, there is no contradiction between any of these verses, *al-ẖamdulillaah.*

The Numerical Miracle of the Qur'aan

The most famous proponent of this idea was Rashad Khalifa, an Egyptian biochemist educated in the United States. According to Dr. Khalifa, there is a miraculous numerical code to the Qur'aan based on its "first" verse (*Bismillahir-Rahmaanir-Raheem*), which consists of 19 letters. This miraculous code is supposedly referred to in verse 30 of Chapter 74 (*al-Muddath-thir*) which states "Over it are 19." Based on these two premises, Dr. Rashad claims to have discovered an intricate mathematical pattern involving 19 and its multiples throughout the Qur'aan and especially in what he calls the Qur'aanic initials which precede 29 chapters (*Alif, Laam, Meem,* etc.). From this discovery, Dr. Khalifa concludes that the complexity of this mathematical code's pattern in a literary work of the Qur'aan's size is far beyond human capabilities, and that it alone constitutes the only real miracle of the Qur'aan which proves its divine origin.[80] He further concludes that 19 and its multiples represent the key to the

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The *nuṯfah* is a single entity after fertilization, but it's chromosomes are half from the father and half from the mother. "Therefore, from the scientific point of view, *amshaaj* is entirely accurate as a plural adjective modifying the singular *nuṯfah,* which is really a multifaceted single entity." *The Qur'an and Modern Science: Correlation Studies*, pp. 27-9.

[78] *Musnad Aẖmad*, no. 4206. The *isnaad* has weakness in it due to the presence of al-Ḻusayn ibn al-Ḻasan al-Fazaaree, who was truthful but prone to mistakes. (See *Taqreeb at-Tahṯheeb*, p. 166, no. 1317.) This part of the *ẖadeeth* is supported by the *ẖadeeth* of 'Abdullaah ibn Salaam reported by al-Bukhaaree which mentions that if the fluid of the woman *(maa' al-mar'ah)* supersedes the fluid of the man, then the child will resemble the mother. (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 5, pp. 189-90, no. 275.)

[79] *The Qur'an and Modern Science: Correlation Studies*, p.31.

[80] See Rashad Khalifa's presentation of his theory in the article "Problem of 19," *Impact International,* 13-26 Nov., 1981, pp.14-15.

correct interpretation of the Qur'aan and Islam, and the reason why 19 was chosen is that 19 means "God is One," which is the message of the Qur'aan.[81]

Many Muslims at first received Khalifa's theories with uncritical enthusiasm. However, when more rigorous critics began checking his numbers, they found numerous discrepancies and some outright fabrications in his data. His claims were based on the number of times a given letter or word occurs in a given *soorah* or group of *soorahs.* It was discovered that he would sometimes treat *hamzahs* like *alifs* and sometimes he wouldn't, depending on the totals he needed in a given *soorah* to confirm his theory. Sometimes he counted letters that weren't there, sometimes he failed to count existing letters, sometimes he counted two words as one, sometimes he added to the Qur'aanic text and sometimes he deleted from it, all for the purpose of making the letter and word counts conform to his theory. On top of that, his letter counts changed over time, depending on whether he wanted to establish a pattern for a *soorah* by itself or as part of a group of *soorahs.* When confronted with inconsistencies in his data, he began claiming that certain verses had been inserted into the Qur'aan that did not belong there. After this clear statement of disbelief he went on to claim knowledge of the exact date of the Day of Judgment and eventually claimed prophethood for himself. He attracted a group of followers in Tucson, Arizona, but his career was cut short when he was stabbed to death by an unknown assailant in 1990.[82]

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[81] *Quran: Visual Presentation of The Miracle,* pp.70-73, 243.
Note: This calculation is based on the *Abjad* system of numerology in which the letters of the Arabic alphabet are given numerical values, a system borrowed from the Jewish mystical system known as Kabbalah.
[82] See *Mission to America*, pp. 137-168. A detailed refutation of this theory can be found in my book, *The Quran's Numerical Miracle: Hoax and Heresy.*

5

WAHY: DIVINE REVELATION

The term "*wahy*" in Arabic means a swift and or secretive transfer of information.[1] It has been used in the Qur'aan as it was used by Arabs in the past to refer to a wide variety of methods by which the transfer of information has taken place.

1. The Qur'aan sometimes uses *wahy* to mean instinctual animal habits. An example of this use can be seen in the case of bees mentioned in the following verse:

﴿ وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى ٱلنَّحْلِ أَنِ ٱتَّخِذِى مِنَ ٱلْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ ٱلشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا يَعْرِشُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾ ﴾

> **"And your Lord inspired the bee by *wahy (awhaa)* to make its home in the mountains, trees, and what (men) build."[2]**

The bee instinctually builds its hives in appropriate places and according to particular patterns as a result of divine commands secretly written in the cells of its minute brain.

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[1] See the definitions of Ibn Faaris and ar-Raaghib al-Isfahaanee quoted in *Lamahaat fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, p. 43.

[2] *Soorah an-Nahl* (16):68.

2. *Wahy* is also used in the Qur'aan to mean natural human instincts that Allaah has placed in humans. For example, Allaah uses it in reference to Prophet Moosaa's mother as follows:

﴿ وَأَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَىٰٓ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰٓ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ ﴾

"And I inspired Moosaa's mother by *wahy (awhaynaa)* to suckle him."[3]

The motherly instinct of suckling her child is a result of information which has been communicated to the genes of every female in a way unknown to man.

3. In the completion of the previous verse, Allaah refers to another aspect of *wahy*: Allaah's inspiration to humans to do actions which are not instinctive.

﴿ فَإِذَا خِفْتِ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِى ٱلْيَمِّ وَلَا تَخَافِى وَلَا تَحْزَنِىٓ ﴾

"Then, when you fear for him, cast him into the river (in a basket), and don't be afraid and don't grieve."

This is sometimes called intuition; a person gets a strong feeling that a certain action is the right thing to do, even though there may not be any logical evidence for it.

4. One must be careful, to distinguish between the sources of various inner voices, however, because devils also have the ability to inspire suggestions in human hearts. Occasionally, the Qur'aan refers to the whispering and prodding of the devils as *wahy*. The following verse is a good example of this type of use:

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[3] *Soorah al-Qasas* (28):7.

﴿ وَإِنَّ ٱلشَّيَـٰطِينَ لَيُوحُونَ إِلَىٰٓ أَوۡلِيَآئِهِمۡ لِيُجَـٰدِلُوكُمۡ ﴾

> **"And verily the devils inspire their allies by *wahy (yoohoona)* to argue with you."[4]**

The *wahy* by which devilish thoughts are inserted into the human minds is also referred to as whispering in the Qur'aan, due to its secretive nature and hidden source. For the same reasons it has been called "*wahy.*"

5. Sometimes *wahy* is used to mean communication by rapid, subtle gestures. For example, Allaah said about the Prophet Zakareeyaa,

﴿ قَالَ رَبِّ ٱجۡعَل لِّيٓ ءَايَةٗۚ قَالَ ءَايَتُكَ أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ ٱلنَّاسَ ثَلَٰثَ لَيَالٖ سَوِيّٗا ﴿١٠﴾ فَخَرَجَ عَلَىٰ قَوۡمِهِۦ مِنَ ٱلۡمِحۡرَابِ فَأَوۡحَىٰٓ إِلَيۡهِمۡ أَن سَبِّحُواْ بُكۡرَةٗ وَعَشِيّٗا ﴿١١﴾ ﴾

> **"He said, 'My Lord, appoint a sign for me.' (The angel) said, 'Your sign will be that for a full three nights you will not speak to people.' Then he went out from the prayer niche to his people and gestured *(awhaa)* to them to praise (Allaah) in the morning and the evening."[5]**

That is, he urged them to worship Allaah more often and more fervently.

6. Allaah uses the term *wahy* to refer to the process by which He gives commands to his angels, as is illustrated in the following example:

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[4] *Soorah al-An'aam* (6):121.

[5] *Soorah Maryam* (19):10-11.

﴿ إِذۡ يُوحِى رَبُّكَ إِلَى ٱلۡمَلَـٰٓٮِٕكَةِ أَنِّى مَعَكُمۡ فَثَبِّتُواْ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ﴾

"When your Lord inspired the angels by *wa*_*h*_*y (yoo*_*h*_*ee):* 'Verily, I am with you all, so strengthen those who believe.' "[6]

Elsewhere in the Qur'aan and _h_*adeeths* of the Prophet (ﷺ), Allaah's communication with His angels is referred to as direct speech. The following verse is an example from the Qur'aan:

﴿ وَإِذۡ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلۡمَلَـٰٓٮِٕكَةِ إِنِّى جَاعِلٌ۬ فِى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ خَلِيفَةً۬ ﴾

"And when your Lord _said_ to the angels, 'Verily, I will put a *khaleefah* on earth.' "[7]

The Prophet (ﷺ) was reported to have said,

(إِذَا تَكَلَّمَ اللهُ بِالْوَحْيِ سَمِعَ أَهْلُ السَّمَاءِ لِلسَّمَاءِ صَلْصَلَةً كَجَرِّ السِّلْسِلَةِ عَلَى الصَّفَا ، فَيُصْعَقُونَ ، فَلاَ يَزَالُونَ كَذَالِكَ حَتَّى يَأْتِيَهُم جِبْرِيلُ ، حَتَّى إِذَا جَاءَهُمْ جِبْرِيلُ فُزِّعَ عَنْ قُلُوبِهِم ، فَيَقُولُونَ : يَا جِبْرِيلُ : مَا ذَا قَالَ رَبُّكَ ؟ فَيَقُولُ : الْحَقَّ ، فَيَقُولُونَ : الْحَقَّ الْحَقَّ .)

"*When Allaah, the Most High, speaks the revelation* (wa_h_y), *the inhabitants of heaven hear the heavens tremble with a sound like the rattling of a chain across a smooth stone. They are stunned and faint, and they remain in that state until Jibreel comes to them. When Jibreel comes to them, the fear is removed from their hearts. They say, 'O Jibreel! What did your Lord say?' He says, 'The truth.' Then they say, 'The truth, the truth.'* "[8]

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[6] *Soorah al-Anfaal* (8):12.
[7] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):30.
[8] Reported by Ibn Mas'ood and collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 3, p. 1326, no. 4720), Ibn Khuzaymah and al-Bayhaqee, and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Silsilah al-*

Hence, it has been concluded that Allaah's commands to the angels are transmitted by Allaah speaking directly to them. From the above it is clear that *wahy* is used to mean not only the process of revelation, but also the revelation itself.

7. The process of revelation of Allaah's commands to His Prophet (ﷺ), as well as the revelation itself, is also referred to in the Qur'aan as *wahy.* A good example of this use is in the following verse:

﴿وَمَا يَنطِقُ عَنِ ٱلۡهَوَىٰٓ ۝٣ إِنۡ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحۡيٞ يُوحَىٰ ۝٤﴾

"And he [the Prophet (ﷺ)] does not speak from his own desires; verily, it (his speech) is revelation *(wahy)* which was revealed (*yoohaa*)."[9]

In the terminology of the *Sharee'ah, wahy* is defined as the process by which Allaah's word is revealed to one of His prophets. It is also used for the actual word of Allaah which has been revealed to one of His prophets.

THE METHOD OF *WAHY*

Allaah's word may be revealed to the prophets in two ways: directly, in the form of true dreams or in the form of direct conversations; and indirectly, by way of the angel of revelation, Jibreel. These ways were identified by Allaah in the Qur'aan as follows:

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَن يُكَلِّمَهُ ٱللَّهُ إِلَّا وَحۡيًا أَوۡ مِن وَرَآيِٕ حِجَابٍ أَوۡ
يُرۡسِلَ رَسُولٗا فَيُوحِيَ بِإِذۡنِهِۦ مَا يَشَآءُۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَلِيٌّ حَكِيمٞ ۝٥١﴾

Ahaadeth as-Saheehah, vol. 3, pp. 282-3, no. 1293. A similar *hadeeth* was reported by an-Nawwaas ibn Sam'aan and collected by at-Tabaraanee.

[9] *Soorah an-Najm* (53):3-4.

“Allaah does not speak to a person except by inspiration *(wa<u>h</u>y)*, or from behind a veil or by sending a messenger who then reveals (*yoo<u>h</u>ee*) by His permission whatever He wishes. Verily, He is most High and Wise.”[10]

Direct Revelations

A portion of Allaah’s revelation was communicated directly to the prophets without any intermediary. This form of revelation came either as visions during a prophet’s sleep, or in the form of words spoken by Allaah from behind a veil of light.

(a) <u>True Dreams:</u> Divine commands were communicated to the prophets in their sleep in the form of dreams that gave them accurate glimpses of future events.

‘Aa’ishah, said, *“Revelation to the Prophet (ﷺ) first began as righteous*[11] *visions in his sleep. Whenever he saw a vision, it would occur as surely as the break of the day.”*[12] This form of revelation was a very gentle means of preparing the Prophet (ﷺ) for the tremendous burden of revelation in the waking state.

Sometimes visions directed the prophets to perform certain acts, as in the case of Prophet Ibraaheem, who is recorded in the Qur’aan as saying to his son Ismaa‘eel,



“O my dear son, verily, I saw in dream that I am to sacrifice you. What is your opinion?”

Ismaa‘eel’s reply is recorded as follows:

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[10] *Soorah ash-Shoora* (42):51.

[11] Some versions of the *<u>h</u>adeeth* use the word “true.”

[12] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, pp. 2-4, no. 3) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 96-8, no. 301).

﴿ قَالَ يَٰٓأَبَتِ ٱفۡعَلۡ مَا تُؤۡمَرُۖ سَتَجِدُنِيٓ إِن شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ١٠٢ ﴾

“O dear father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, Allaah willing, among those who are patient.”[13]

Both Prophet Ibraaheem and his son knew that the vision was a divine command which they had to fulfill.

The only *soorah* of the Qur’aan reported to have been revealed in a vision was *Soorah al-Kawthar*. The *sahaabee* Anas ibn Maalik said, “*Once while Allaah’s Messenger* (ﷺ) *was among us in the* masjid, *he dozed off, then raised his head, smiling. I asked him, ‘What has amused you, O Messenger of Allaah* (ﷺ)*?’ He replied, ‘A* soorah *has just been revealed to me.’ Then he recited, ‘In the name of Allaah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful,*

﴿ إِنَّآ أَعۡطَيۡنَٰكَ ٱلۡكَوۡثَرَ ١ فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَٱنۡحَرۡ ٢ إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ ٱلۡأَبۡتَرُ ٣ ﴾

“Verily, I have given you *Kawthar* (the fountain in paradise) so pray to your Lord and sacrifice. Verily, it is your enemy who will be cut off.”
’ ”[14]

It should be noted that true dreams are not restricted to the prophets only.[15] However, true dreams of common people are not the same as the true dreams of the prophets. Every dream of the prophets was a true dream; hence, their dreams

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[13] *Soorah as-Saafaat* (37):102.
[14] Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 220, no. 790).
[15] As is evident from the following statement of the Prophet: “*After me divine revelation* (wahy) *will completely cease...except in the case of glad tidings...good dreams.*” *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 9, p. 98, no. 119.

are a reliable source of guidance. On the other hand, ordinary persons only know that their dreams are true if and when they come true. The ordinary person's dreams are mostly a mixture of recollections, fantasies, and evil dreams implanted by the devils, with occasional true dreams. Hence, one cannot claim any of one's dreams to be true before its occurrence.

(b) Divine Speech: The second method of direct communication by Allaah with His prophets took the form of direct speech, in which the actual words of Allaah were spoken to the prophets. In this case, the prophets were in a waking state, but a veil of light separated them from Allaah and prevented them from seeing Him.[16] This form of communication only occurred with two prophets, as far as we know. The first of those was Prophet Moosaa, about whom Allaah stated the following in the Qur'aan:

﴿ وَلَمَّا جَآءَ مُوسَىٰ لِمِيقَـٰتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُۥ رَبُّهُۥ ﴾

> **"And when Moosaa came to Our appointed place and his Lord spoke to him..."**[17]

This method of communication was apparently the main way in which Prophet Moosaa received revelation, hence his title "*Kaleemullah*" (the one to whom Allaah spoke).[18]

The second prophet to listen to the direct speech of Allaah was Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). However, this pheno-menon occurred on only one occasion during his prophethood; at the time of the Prophet's ascension up into the heavens (*Mi'raaj*).[19]

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[16] See *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 113, nos. 341-2.
[17] *Soorah al-A'raaf* (7):143.
[18] See *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 127, no. 377.
[19] See *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 100-4, nos. 309 and 313.

Indirect Revelation

The vast majority of Allaah’s revelation was conveyed to the prophets by way of the angel of revelation, Jibreel. The final book of revelation, the Qur’aan, was revealed in this way for the most part. This form of revelation reached the Prophet (ﷺ) in two ways: either in the form of the reverbrating sound like the gong of a bell, or in the form of the direct speech of the angel.

In the first case, the angel remained in a spiritual state and the Prophet (ﷺ) was required to raise spiritually to a suitable state in which to receive the revelation. This method was extremely taxing on the Prophet (ﷺ). During it the voice of the angel resembled the loud ringing of a giant bell. The *sahaabee* al-Haarith ibn Hishaam once asked the Prophet (ﷺ) to describe how the revelation came to him. The Prophet (ﷺ) replied,

(أَحْيَانًا يَأْتِينِي مِثْلَ صَلْصَلَةِ الْجَرَسِ وَهُوَ أَشَدُّهُ عَلَيَّ فَيُفْصَمُ عَنِّي وَقَدْ وَعَيْتُ عَنْهُ مَا قَالَ .)

“*Sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of a bell—this is the most severe form for me—then the ringing ceases and I have understood what (the angel) said.*”[20]

‘Aa’ishah described the intensity of this form as follows: “I have seen him when revelation (*wahy*) descended upon him on an extremely cold day, yet when it stopped his forehead would be dripping with sweat.”[21]

The second method was much easier for the Prophet (ﷺ) to bear than the first. In this case, the angel would leave the spiritual world, appear to the Prophet (ﷺ) in human form and pass on the revelation in the medium of human speech. The Prophet (ﷺ) described this form to al-Haarith ibn Hishaam as follows:

(وَأَحْيَانًا يَتَمَثَّلُ لِيَ الْمَلَكُ رَجُلاً فَيُكَلِّمُنِي فَأَعِي مَا يَقُولُ .)

“*Occasionally the angel appears before me in the form of a man and speaks to me, and I grasp all that he says.*”[22]

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[20] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, p. 2, no. 2.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

TYPES OF *WAHY*

Just as the *wahy* was conveyed by different methods (direct and indirect) and forms (visions and speech), there were variations in the types of revelation which were conveyed: the Qur'aan, *hadeeth qudsee,* and *hadeeths* of the Prophet (ﷺ).

Wahy in the form of the Qur'aan is defined as Allaah's word revealed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in Arabic, whose style and construction is miraculously inimitable and whose recitation is a form of worship.[23] On the other hand, *wahy* in the form of *hadeeth qudsee* is defined simply as Allaah's word revealed in Arabic to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Such *hadeeths* are those in which the Prophet (ﷺ) attributes statements directly to Allaah, saying, for example, "*Allaah said...*" or "*Your Lord said....*" or the *sahabee* says, "The Prophet (ﷺ) reported from his Lord..."[24]

As for the *hadeeths* of the Prophet (ﷺ), they can be divided into two main categories. The first consists of statements of the Prophet (ﷺ) based on his own reasoning (*ijtihaad*). Such statements are not considered to be *wahy*. However, even this category is indirectly connected with *wahy*, because his statements were either corrected by revelation if incorrect, or approved by the absence of revelation if correct.[25] The second category is prophetic statements whose meanings were revealed *(wahy)*, but whose expressions were in the Prophet's own words. This is the only part of the *hadeeths* of the Prophet (ﷺ) that can rightly be considered *wahy.*

DOUBTS ABOUT QUR'AANIC *WAHY*

Attempts to create doubts about the authenticity of the Qur'aan have been made from the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) until today. Hence, a study of *wahy* would be incomplete without a look at the doubts which have been raised, as well as the replies which have been given to them.

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[23] See *Sharh al-Kawkab al-Muneer*, vol. 2, pp. 7-8.
[24] *Qawaa'id at-Tahdeeth min Funoon Mustalih al-Hadeeth*, p. 65.
[25] See *Sharh al-Kawkab al-Muneer*, vol. 4, pp. 473-80.

The following objections to the divine origin of the Qur'aan are the two most commonly raised:

(1) The Qur'aan was the product of Muhammad's intelligence. (2) Muhammad (ﷺ) was taught the stories of the Qur'aan by someone else.

Some critics claim that the meanings of the Qur'aan were made up by the Prophet (ﷺ), and its unique style devised by him. If such a claim were true, it would mean that the Prophet's claim that the Qur'aan was revealed was false. That is, the Prophet (ﷺ) either knowingly or unknowingly deceived his followers. The kinder critics claim that the Prophet (ﷺ) was well-intentioned, as his biography has proven him to be, but the "revelations" were really delusions and hallucinations which afflicted him from time to time. This claim is totally unsubstantiated historically, and the clarity and coherence of the Qur'aan could not have been the result of a madman's ramblings. The less kind critics claim that the Prophet (ﷺ) deceived his followers in order to firmly establish his leadership over them and eventually over the whole of Arabia. However, if the Prophet's goal had been personal glory and leadership, it would have been more to his advantage to claim the Qur'aan for himself, since his enemies among the pagan Makkans had all conceded its superiority over all other literary works and had offered the Prophet (ﷺ) the position of kingship over Makkah if he would only stop preaching the unity of God.

Other critics of the Qur'aan's divine origins claim that the Prophet (ﷺ) attributed it to Allaah in order to give more weight to his words in the minds of people and increase their obedience to him. But if that were the case, he would not have bothered to attribute any of his statements to himself. In fact, his attribution of statements to himself has not in any way affected the obligation of his followers to obey him.

Criticisms such as those previously mentioned would put the Prophet (ﷺ) among worldly leaders who deceive their followers in order to achieve power, prestige, and the luxuries of this life. However, the Prophet's biography, which has been recorded in the minutest of details, proves the exact opposite. Instead of deception and corruption, we find the Prophet (ﷺ) known for his truthfulness and generosity, so much so that he was named "*al-Ameen*" (the Trustworthy). He lived very simply, and we find that he died without leaving any wealth or debts behind him.

It should also be noted that there are many instances in the Qur'aan where the Prophet's mistakes were openly corrected. For example, when the Prophet (ﷺ) accepted ransom for the prisoners of Badr,[26] the following verse was revealed:

﴿ مَا كَانَ لِنَبِيٍّ أَن يَكُونَ لَهُۥٓ أَسۡرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ يُثۡخِنَ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ تُرِيدُونَ عَرَضَ ٱلدُّنۡيَا وَٱللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةَۗ وَٱللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٞ ٦٧ لَّوۡلَا كِتَٰبٞ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ سَبَقَ لَمَسَّكُمۡ فِيمَآ أَخَذۡتُمۡ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٞ ٦٨ ﴾

"It is not fitting for a prophet to take prisoners until he has established himself in the land (by overcoming the enemy in war). You all desire the fleeting gains of this world while Allaah wishes (for you the fruit of) the next world. And Allaah is Powerful and Wise. Had it not been for a previous decree by Allaah, you all would have been struck with a severe punishment."[27]

Another example is when the Prophet (ﷺ) brushed aside 'Abdullaah ibn Umm Maktoom, who had asked that he be taught the Qur'aan. The Prophet (ﷺ) had been earnestly engaged with a group of Qurayshee leaders whom he was calling to Islaam. Allaah revealed the following verses:

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[26] The first major battle fought against the people of Makkah. It occurred one year after the migration to Madeenah.

[27] *Soorah al-Anfaal* (8):67-68.

﴿ عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّىٰٓ ۝١ أَن جَآءَهُ ٱلۡأَعۡمَىٰ ۝٢ وَمَا يُدۡرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُۥ يَزَّكَّىٰٓ ۝٣ أَوۡ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنفَعَهُ ٱلذِّكۡرَىٰٓ ۝٤ أَمَّا مَنِ ٱسۡتَغۡنَىٰ ۝٥ فَأَنتَ لَهُۥ تَصَدَّىٰ ۝٦ وَمَا عَلَيۡكَ أَلَّا يَزَّكَّىٰ ۝٧ ﴾

"He frowned and turned away because the blind man came to him. Yet for all you knew he might have grown in purity or been reminded and benefited from the reminder. As for him who regards himself as self-sufficient, you attend to him, though you are not to blame if he does not become purified."[28]

For the Prophet (ﷺ) to expose such minor errors which were imperceptible to those around him was certainly not to his advantage if his goals were power and prestige.

Other critics have claimed that the Prophet (ﷺ) learned the knowledge contained in the Qur'aan from Christian or Jewish sources. There is a report, about whose authenticity the scholars of *hadeeth* are divided, that the Prophet (ﷺ), while still a boy, travelled to Syria with his uncle and guardian Aboo Taalib, and on the way met a Christian monk, Buhayraa.[29] There is no dispute that after the beginning of revelation, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was introduced by his wife Khadeejah to her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who was known to have knowledge of the Torah and Gospels. The Prophet (ﷺ) is also known to have met Jewish and Christian scholars after his migration from Makkah to Madeenah.[30] However, his meeting with the monk was short, and all that transpired was the monk's prophecy to the Prophet's uncle Aboo Taalib of his nephew's impending prophethood. As for Waraqah ibn Nawfal, he only confirmed that what was revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) came from the same source as the revelations of the

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[28] *Soorah 'Abasa* (80):1-7.

[29] Reported by at-Tirmithee. Ibn Katheer, ath-Thahabee and Ibn Seed an-Naas rejected the report, whose narrators are not less than *sadooq*, due to certain historical inaccuracies in the text. Al-Albaanee authenticated it in *Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmithee*, vol. 3, p.191, no. 2862. See *ar-Raheeq al-Makhtum*, p.60-1.

[30] See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, pp. 2-4, no. 3, vol. 5, pp. 189-91, no. 275, and vol. 5, pp. 469-70, no. 663.

earlier prophets. There is no record of the Prophet (ﷺ) having studied with him, and Waraqah died shortly after this incident. In Madeenah, the Christians and the Jews used to debate with the Prophet (ﷺ) and ask him questions; many of the Madeenan verses answered their questions.[31] They would ask him questions in order to disprove his prophethood, and he would answer with the Qur'aan. There is no historical record of anyone having taught the Prophet (ﷺ). Some, however, claim that Haddaad, the Roman, was his teacher, but such a claim is quite erroneous, because the Makkans did not consider Haddaad knowledgeable, nor was he free to teach. He was known to be fully occupied as a blacksmith, and it was known that he was a foreigner who could barely speak Arabic.[32] The Arabs of the Prophet's time were very anxious to discredit the Qur'aan, but they were unable to do so. If there had been a secret teacher, he would surely have been exposed at that time.

Recently, most of the Qur'aanic stories that do not occur in the Torah or Gospels, or which contradict them, have been traced to apocryphal[33] books of the Christians and Jews.[34] This has been cited as proof that the Prophet (ﷺ) studied the books of the Christians and the Jews. However, the number of obscure books to which the Qur'aanic stories have been traced is great, and the languages of these books vary between Amharic, Syriac, Hebrew and Greek.[35] Consequently, the Prophet (ﷺ), who could not read or write, would have had to spend most of his time studying foreign languages, searching all over the Middle East for the books and studying them in depth. Thus, even the most recent of critical research only further confirms the divine origin of the Qur'aan.

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[31] See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 63-4, no. 79, and p. 207, no. 245.

[32] See *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*, vol. 2, p. 208, the commentary on 16:103.

[33] The *Apocrypha* are fourteen books of the *Septuagint* (a Greek translation of the Old Testament) rejected in Protestantism and Judaism; eleven are in the Roman Catholic bible. Other ancient Christian texts written by sects at odds with the Catholic church, such as those found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, have been discovered only in the last half century.

[34] *Introducing Islam*, pp. 30-1.

[35] See *Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p. 229, and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 22, p. 9. Detailed charges can be found in Robert Morey's book, *Islamic Invasion*, portions of which are excerpted on the internet: http://members.aol.com/kingcome/cults/islam.htm. (A devastating rebuttal of Morey's Moon God theory, documenting his deceitful quotation of source material, has been written by Shabbir Ali.)

6

THE REVELATIONS OF THE QUR'AAN

According to Allaah's statements in His Book, there were two distinct revelations of the Qur'aan which took place. It is important that these two revelations be understood in order to clear up the apparent contradictions in the various terms used in the Qur'aan and *Sunnah* to describe the Qur'aan's revelation. On one hand, the Qur'aan is referred to as having been revealed in its totality in Ramadaan or on *Laylatul-Qadr*, the Night of Decree; while on the other hand, it is referred to as having been continuously revealed in segments up until just before the death of the Prophet (ﷺ).

The First Revelation

Allaah caused the Qur'aan to descend from the Protected Tablet (*al-Lawh al-Mahfooth*) on which it was written to the lowest heaven. In this revelation all of the Qur'aan was sent down at one time to a station in the lowest heaven referred to as "*Bayt al-'Izzah*" (The House of Honor or Power). The blessed night on which this descent took place is called "*Laylatul-Qadr*" (The Night of Decree), one of the odd-numbered nights in the last ten days of the month of Ramadaan. Allaah referred to this initial revelation as follows:

﴿ حمٓ ۝١ وَٱلۡكِتَٰبِ ٱلۡمُبِينِ ۝٢ إِنَّآ أَنزَلۡنَٰهُ فِي لَيۡلَةٖ مُّبَٰرَكَةٍۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُنذِرِينَ ۝٣ ﴾

“*Haa Meem.* By the Clear Book, verily, I revealed it in a blessed night.”[36]

﴿ إِنَّآ أَنزَلۡنَٰهُ فِي لَيۡلَةِ ٱلۡقَدۡرِ ۝١ ﴾

“Verily, I revealed it on the Night of Decree.”[37]

﴿ شَهۡرُ رَمَضَانَ ٱلَّذِيٓ أُنزِلَ فِيهِ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانُ هُدٗى لِّلنَّاسِ ﴾

“The month of Ramadaan in which I revealed the Qur’aan as guidance to mankind ...”[38]

These verses have to refer to the initial revelation because it is a known fact that the whole Qur’aan was not revealed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) on a single night in Ramadaan.

Ibn ‘Abbaas stated that the Qur’aan was first separated from its station in the upper heavens and placed in *Bayt al-‘Izzah* in the lowest heaven.[39] One version states that this took place on the Night of Decree in Ramadaan.[40] Had it been Allaah’s wish, the Qur’aan could then have been revealed as a whole to the

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[36] *Soorah ad-Dukhaan* (44):1-3.
[37] *Soorah al-Qadr* (97):1.
[38] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):185.
[39] Collected by al-Haakim in *al-Mustadrak*, vol. 2, pp. 665-6, no. 4216. Although the statement was not raised by Ibn ‘Abbaas to the Prophet (ﷺ), it relates to the unseen world and could not have been made on the basis of reasoning. One of the narrators in the *isnaad*, al-A‘mash is reliable, but he is a *mudallis*, which means his reports cannot be accepted, unless he explicitly states that he heard the *hadeeth* from the person he attributed it to. He didn’t do that here, so the *isnaad* is weak.
[40] Collected by an-Nasaa’ee in *as-Sunan al-Kubraa*, vol. 5, p. 7, no. 7991, and by at-Tabaraanee in *al-Mu‘jam al-Kabeer*. At-Tabaraanee’s *isnaad* includes a weak narrator. Nasaa’ee’s narrators are all reliable, but one of them is al-A‘mash. In this version also, he didn’t explicitly state that he heard the *hadeeth* from the person he attributed it to, so both *isnaads* are weak. However, an-Nasaa’ee collected two supporting narrations with authentic *isnaads* in the same chapter. They both mention the transferal of the Qur’aan to the lowest heaven during *Laylatul-Qadr*, but they don’t mention *Bayt al-‘Izzah*.

Prophet (ﷺ) in a single revelation. This was the method by which all of the earlier books of revelation were sent down.[41] But, Allaah chose to divide the revelation into two parts. The first revelation within the heavens represented an announcement to the inhabitants of the heavens that the final book of revelation was being sent down upon the last of the prophets.

The Second Revelation

From the lowest heaven sections of the Qur'aan were then taken down by the angel Jibreel to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). This process of revelation continued over the twenty-three years of his prophethood. This revelation began with the first five verses of *Soorah al-'Alaq.* These verses were revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) while he was on a spiritual retreat in the cave of Hiraa' near Makkah.[42] However, the first complete *soorah* to be revealed was *Soorah al-Faatihah.*[43] The revelation of this portion of Qur'aan marked the beginning of the final phase of

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[41] As-Suyootee says, "That the previous books were revealed all at once is well known from the statements of the scholars, such that it may practically be called *ijmaa'.* However, I have seen some prominent contemporary scholars questioning this position, saying that there is no evidence for it and that, in fact, they were revealed over a period of time like the Qur'aan. I say the correct position is the first one. Among the evidences for that is the verse [32] from *Soorah al-Furqaan* **["And those who disbelieve say, 'Why is the Qur'aan not revealed to him all at once?' (It is revealed) thus so I may strengthen your heart by it, and I have arranged it in right order."]**

"Ibn Abee Haatim reports from Sa'eed ibn Jubayr who quotes Ibn 'Abbaas that the Jews said, 'O Muhammad, why wasn't the Qur'aan revealed all at once, as the Torah was revealed to Moosaa? Then the verse (from *Soorah al-Furqaan*) was revealed." He reported by another *isnaad* a similar report, except that the questioners were idolaters. He gathered similar reports on the authority of Qataadah and as-Suddee.

"If you were to say that the Qur'aan is not explicit on this, and that even if these reports are authentic, these statements were made by disbelievers, I would reply as follows:

"The fact that Allaah mentioned their objection without challenging the historical truth of their claim, but instead explained the wisdom behind (gradual revelation), is an indicator that their statement was factually correct. If the previous books had been revealed gradually, it would have been sufficient to refute them by saying that it was Allaah's standard practice for the books He revealed to the previous prophets. That was how He responded to their objection, **'What is it with this messenger that he eats food and walks in the markets?'** (25:7) **['We never sent messengers before you who did not eat food and walk in the markets.']** (25:20)." *Al-Itqaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, vol. 1, p. 122.

[42] Reported by 'Aa'ishah and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, pp. 2-4, no. 3) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 96-8, no. 301).

[43] Collected by al-Bayhaqee in *Dalaa'il an-Nuboowah* and al-Waahidee in *Asbaab an-Nuzool.* As-Suyootee said its narrators were reliable but the *isnaad* is *mursal.* See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, pp.70-71.

prophethood. The last *soorah* to be revealed was *Soorah an-Nasr*.[44] This *soorah* was brought down in Minaa during the Farewell Hajj of the Prophet (ﷺ), which took place at the end of the tenth year after the *Hijrah*. According to Ibn 'Abbaas, the last verse to be revealed was verse 281 in *Soorah al-Baqarah*, the last of a series of verses dealing with interest.[45] Allaah has referred to the second revelation in the following way:

﴿ وَقُرْءَانًا فَرَقْنَـٰهُ لِتَقْرَأَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ عَلَىٰ مُكْثٍ وَنَزَّلْنَـٰهُ تَنزِيلًا ﴿١٠٦﴾ ﴾

"And (it is) a Qur'aan which I have divided into parts in order that you (Muhammad) may recite it to the people gradually, and I have revealed it by successive revelation."[46]

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SEGMENTED REVELATION

There are a number of reasons why the second revelation took place in segments rather than all at once, as happened with the former books of revelation. The following are only a summary of the most obvious reasons:

1. Steadying the Prophet's Heart

The Prophet (ﷺ) was faced with many trials at the hands of his enemies among the idolaters and the Jews. They called him a liar and a fake and tried every possible way to break his spirit. Whenever the pressure of his opponents reached its peak and became virtually unbearable, Allaah would reveal certain verses to comfort the Prophet (ﷺ). For example:

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[44] That was Ibn 'Abbaas's opinion, as collected by Imaam Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1554, nos. 7174-5). Other *sahaabah* had differing opinions. See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, pp. 77-81.

[45] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 51, no. 67). This verse, **"And guard yourselves against a day when you will be brought back to Allaah; then every soul will be paid in full what it earned, and they will not be wronged,"** did not involve an addition to Islaamic legislation, therefore there is no contradiction between this report and the statement of Allaah in *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):3, revealed at the Farewell Hajj, **"This day I have completed your *deen* for you."**

[46] *Soorah al-Israa'* (17):106.

﴿ وَقَالَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ لَوۡلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيۡهِ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانُ جُمۡلَةٗ وَٰحِدَةٗۚ كَذَٰلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِۦ فُؤَادَكَۖ وَرَتَّلۡنَٰهُ تَرۡتِيلٗا ٣٢ ﴾

> **"And those who disbelieve say, 'Why is the Qur'aan not revealed to him all at once?' But it is like that in order that we may steady your heart with it; and We have arranged its component parts in an orderly, consistent manner."**[47]

Allaah would also give him confidence by reminding him of the trials of the former prophets and how they were eventually given success. For example,

﴿ وَلَقَدۡ كُذِّبَتۡ رُسُلٞ مِّن قَبۡلِكَ فَصَبَرُواْ عَلَىٰ مَا كُذِّبُواْ وَأُوذُواْ حَتَّىٰٓ أَتَىٰهُمۡ نَصۡرُنَاۚ ﴾

> **"Verily, the prophets before you were called liars, but they were patient in spite of being accused of lies and in spite of the harm which befell them until My aid came to them."**[48]

At other times Allaah would actually promise him help and victory:

﴿ وَيَنصُرَكَ ٱللَّهُ نَصۡرًا عَزِيزًا ٣ ﴾

"And Allaah will help you with a great victory."[49]

Or Allaah would inform him of the failure of his enemies:

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47 *Soorah al-Furqaan* (25):32.
48 *Soorah al-An'aam* (6):34.
49 *Soorah al-Fat-h* (48):3.

﴿ قُلْ لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَتُغْلَبُونَ وَتُحْشَرُونَ إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ ۚ وَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ ﴿١٢﴾ ﴾

"Tell those who disbelieve, 'You will be defeated and gathered in Hell, a terrible place of rest.' "[50]

Thus, certain segments of the Qur'aan were revealed at various point in his mission specifically to comfort the Prophet (ﷺ) and give him steadfastness and confidence in order to fulfill his obligation of propagating Islaam.

2. Gentleness With the Prophet (ﷺ)

The descent of revelation was a great burden which usually left the Prophet (ﷺ) drained and weak. 'Aa'ishah reported that once, on an extremely cold day, she saw him when revelation came and left him. And, in spite of the cold weather, his forehead was dripping with sweat.[51] Even Allaah Himself referred to the Qur'aan as being weighty and burdensome:



"Verily, I will cast on you a heavy set of words."[52]

And, in order to emphasize the greatness, power and weight of the word of God, Allaah set forth the following metaphor:

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[50] *Soorah Aal 'Imraan* (3):12.

[51] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol.1, p. 2, no. 2).

[52] *Soorah al-Muzzammil* (73):5.

﴿ لَوۡ أَنزَلۡنَا هَٰذَا ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَ عَلَىٰ جَبَلٖ لَّرَأَيۡتَهُۥ خَٰشِعٗا مُّتَصَدِّعٗا مِّنۡ خَشۡيَةِ ٱللَّهِ ﴾

"If I were to have revealed this Qur'aan to a mountain, you would have seen it humbly crumble into pieces out of fear of Allaah."[53]

Thus, the revelation of the final word of Allaah in one stroke would have been too much for the Prophet (ﷺ) to bear. Such a revelation would have placed him under the most extreme pressure. It was, therefore, broken down into bearable segments and revealed gradually. In this way the Prophet (ﷺ) would only be burdened for short periods of time and his mission would not be hampered by long periods of recovery. Thus, the segmented method of revelation represents the gentle manner in which Allaah dealt with His last messenger due to the might and glory of the final message.

3. Gradation in Legislation

The method by which the Qur'aan was used to present the principles of Islaam was a gradual method. All of the principles were not enjoined in the beginning or all at once during any stage. The early *soorahs* of the Qur'aan were aimed at treating the main problem which confronted the worship of Allaah and His unity: *shirk*.[54] Belief in Allaah's supremacy and unity had to be built and the false gods of creation had to be removed. Thus, the early *soorahs* concentrated on *tawheed*[55] and the other major pillar of *eemaan*,[56] belief in the Resurrection and Judgment. It was not until after twelve years of building *eemaan* that *salaah* was made compulsory, during the Prophet's Ascent *(mi'raaj)* to the heavens.[57] One year before the Hijrah, the Qur'aanic verses began to stress *salaah* as a requirement for

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[53] *Soorah al-Hashr* (59):21.
[54] The worship of other than Allaah.
[55] Belief in Allaah's unity and that He is the only true deity deserving of worship.
[56] Faith.
[57] See *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 100-3, no. 309. Ibn Hishaam mentions reports of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions praying from the early days of the Makkan period although it was not yet obligatory, and ash-Shaafi'ee stated that in the early days prayer at night was obligatory, as is indicated by the beginning of *Soorah Muzammil*, but that the final verse of the same *soorah* abrogated the obligation. See *Fat-h al-Baaree*, vol. 1, p. 554 and *ar-Raheeq al-Makhtum*, p. 78.

the believers. It was not until two years after the Hijrah that the Qur'aanic verses turned to *sawm* and *zakaah* and enjoined them on Muslims.[58] Finally, in the sixth year after the Hijrah, the verses of the Qur'aan revealed hajj as an obligation for whoever is able to perform it.[59]

'Aa'ishah mentioned that the first thing to be revealed of the Qur'aan dealt with Heaven and Hell and that it was only after some time that issues of legal and illegal acts were dealt with. She said, "If the first thing to be revealed had been, 'Don't drink liquor,' or 'Don't commit adultery and fornication,' they would have said, 'We will never give [it] up.' "[60]

If the Qur'aan had been revealed all at once, it would not have been possible to establish the laws in a gradual fashion. This method was particularly important for the first generation of Muslims who would later establish Islaam in the earth. It was necessary for them to have a clear understanding of the principles of Islaam because the later generations of Muslims would depend on their interpretation and practice of Islaam.

4. Facilitating the Preservation of the Qur'aan

Since the majority of the Prophet's followers were unable to read or write, the main method of preserving the Qur'aan became that of memorization. So, if the whole Qur'aan had been revealed at once, they would have been unable to memorize all of it due to its length.

Even the few who were able to write would have been unable to record all of it, due to the scarcity of writing materials at the time. Thus, the revelation of the Qur'aan in sections made it easier for the companions to memorize the whole Qur'aan and teach it to each other. 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab was reported to have said, "Learn the Qur'aan five verses at a time, for verily, Jibreel used to descend with the Qur'aan for the Prophet (ﷺ) five at a time."[61] This also made it easier for

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[58] *Zakaah* was mentioned in Makkan verses (e.g., 30:38-9, 27:1-3, 31:4, 41:6-7), but as the Muslims were without a state, it was left to individuals to pay it, and there were no restrictions or qualifications as to the amount of *zakaah* required on each category of wealth. See *Fiqh az-Zakaah*, vol. 1, pp. 52-61. See also *Zaad al-Ma'aad*, vol. 2, p. 30.

[59] See *Nayl al-Awtaar*, vol. 4, pp. 337-8.

[60] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 483-4, no. 515.

[61] Collected by al-Bayhaqee in *Shu'ab al-Eemaan* and quoted by as-Suyootee in *al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, pp. 124-5. As-Suyootee notes, however, that it is authentically established that some passages were revealed ten verses at one time, and on some occasions only a part of a verse would be revealed.

the scribes of the Prophet (ﷺ) to record all of the Qur'aan during his lifetime. This early preservation of Qur'aan was critical to maintaining the purity of the teachings of Islaam, as it was the alterations in earlier books of revelation which led their followers astray. The gradual revelation of the Qur'aan also gave them a greater opportunity to contemplate the meanings of the verses. This, in turn, caused them to question the Prophet (ﷺ) in order to clarify certain points or verify certain interpretations. Thus, this generation was able to gain a truly deep understanding of the Qur'aan. This was of great importance, because their practical implementation of the principles of the Qur'aan became a guide to later generations of Muslims and continues to be one to this day. Such an understanding would not have been possible had the Qur'aan been revealed all at once.

5. Dealing With Problems as They Arose

Often the verses of the Qur'aan would be revealed to deal specifically with problems which faced the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions. Sometimes people would ask the Prophet (ﷺ) questions about which he had no knowledge, and Allaah would reveal the answer. For example, it was reported that the story about Thul-Qarnayn was revealed because the Jews asked the Prophet (ﷺ) about him, as a test of his prophethood. Allaah revealed:

﴿ وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَن ذِى ٱلْقَرْنَيْنِ ۖ قُلْ سَأَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْكُم مِّنْهُ ذِكْرًا ﴿٨٣﴾ ﴾

"And they ask you about Thul-Qarnayn. Tell them, 'I will read to you a report.' "[62]

At other times, verses would be revealed to correct an error made by the Prophet (ﷺ) himself. An example of this is in *Soorah at-Tawbah*, in which Allaah told the Prophet (ﷺ),

[62] *Soorah al-Kahf* (18):83. See *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*, vol. 3, p. 106.

﴿ عَفَا ٱللَّهُ عَنكَ لِمَ أَذِنتَ لَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكَ ٱلَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا۟ وَتَعْلَمَ ٱلْكَٰذِبِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾ ﴾

"May Allaah pardon you.[63] Why did you grant them permission to stay at home before it became obvious to you who was speaking the truth and you came to know who were the liars?"[64]

Mujaahid said the verse was revealed about some people who advised others, "Ask the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) to excuse you (from participating in the expedition to Tabook). If he gives you permission, stay home, and if he doesn't permit you, stay home, (anyway)." Ibn Katheer said "The Most High is saying, 'You shouldn't have given permission to any of them to stay behind so you could have known who was truthful in his display of obedience to you and who was lying. For they were firm in their intention to stay behind.' "[65]

Verses were also revealed to correct wrong attitudes which were widespread among the Muslims of that time. An example of such a revelation is the case of the Battle of Hunayn. Muslims had left to do battle with the disbelievers feeling that they were sure to be victorious, since their numbers exceeded that of the enemy many times over. The enemy ambushed them and caused them to turn on their heels and flee in defeat. However, after that initial lesson, Allaah gave them success over the enemy in the same battle. Then, He revealed the following verse:

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[63] Muhammad Asad writes, "All the commentators agree...that this phrase, although expressed in the form of an invocation, has the meaning of a statement—'God pardons thee,' or 'has pardoned thee.' " (*The Message of the Qur'an*, p. 266.)

[64] *Soorah at-Tawbah* (9):43.

[65] See *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*, vol. 2, p. 375.

﴿ وَيَوۡمَ حُنَيۡنٍ ۙ إِذۡ أَعۡجَبَتۡكُمۡ كَثۡرَتُكُمۡ فَلَمۡ تُغۡنِ عَنكُمۡ شَيۡـًٔا وَضَاقَتۡ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡأَرۡضُ بِمَا رَحُبَتۡ ثُمَّ وَلَّيۡتُم مُّدۡبِرِينَ ٢٥ ﴾

"And on the day of Hunayn, when your large numbers pleased you, they did not benefit you at all, and the earth became narrow in spite of its vastness, then you turned around in retreat."[66]

By dealing with the various incidents at the time that they occurred, the Qur'aan was able to reach those involved more directly. Corrections made immediately after errors take place tend to have a greater impact than general advice given long before or after. If the Qur'aan had been revealed all at once, it would not have been possible to treat these and similar problems within their context.

6. An Indication of the Qur'aan's Source

The revelation of the Qur'aan in segments over twenty-three years is clear proof that it is Allaah's word, alone, and not that of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) or any other member of creation. That is proven by the unity and consistency of expression from beginning to end. Its basic subject matter is intimately interwoven throughout its one hundred and fourteen chapters, and all of the chapters seem interconnected like priceless pearls on a single necklace. Its rhyme and rhythm flow unhindered through every verse in the book in a unified style, in spite of the variations in subject matter and sentence structure. How could such a consistency arise when the Qur'aan was not available in its complete form from the beginning? How could it arise when its verses and chapters often dealt with incidents occurring at various stages of the movement? How could it be the product of the mind of a man who could neither read or write, nor had he displayed any special ability to compose prior to the beginning of his mission? Even the greatest of writers have variations in their styles, especially over long periods of time. Therefore, the fact that the Qur'aan was revealed in sections over a period of twenty-three years clearly proves that its origin was not of this world.

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[66] *Soorah at-Tawbah* (9):25.

Its source had to be the Lord of the Worlds, Allaah, Most Great and Glorious. Allaah Himself pointed to this fact in the Qur'aan, saying,

﴿ أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ ۚ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِندِ غَيْرِ ٱللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا۟ فِيهِ ٱخْتِلَـٰفًا كَثِيرًا ﴿٨٢﴾ ﴾

> **"Won't they contemplate the Qur'aan? If it had come from other than Allaah, they would have found in it many contradictions."**[67]

Whenever the Prophet (ﷺ) had a new revelation, he would tell his companions to put it after other earlier revelations or before them. The Prophet (ﷺ) had no idea what he was going to face in the future or how long he was going to live. His life was filled with a multitude of incidents which, without a doubt, altered his mood and his mode of expression. Yet, the Qur'aan in no way reflected these differences. The Qur'aan is definitely not the product of Muhammad (ﷺ), as some would like to claim, and that fact is proven by the Qur'aan itself.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF SEGMENTED REVELATION

The process of education depends on the following two basic principles: (a) taking into account the mental level of the students, and (b) developing their mental, spiritual and physical abilities with material which guides their thought processes in the correct direction. Both of these important principles have been carefully taken into consideration by the revelation of the Qur'aan in segments. Gradation of legislation took into account the level of the Muslim community during its various stages of development. The revelation of corrections and answers at the time when they were most needed trained, developed and guided the mental, spiritual and physical faculties in the right direction.

The question which naturally arises here is why the earlier books of revelation were revealed as a whole. The answer to this question lies in the role of the earlier books and the history of prophethood. The earlier books were sent for short periods in human history and were directed to specific nations or tribes.

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[67] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):82.

They contained principles which were not time or situation oriented and could be revealed all at once, at the beginning of a mission or at any point during it. It should also be noted that the earlier books were not in themselves miracles, whereas in the case of the Last Prophet (ﷺ), it was the major miracle given to him, for, as was mentioned earlier, the segmentation of the revelation combined with the consistency of style was a proof of its divine origin. Also, the earlier prophets were both preceded and followed by other prophets, so each prophet and his book represented a segment of the overall revelation. Thus, the gradation in legislation took place from prophet to prophet. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was the last of the prophets and his book of revelation contained the essential messages of all previous books. Thus, his followers had to be properly prepared to carry the final message to the world. As such, the gradation in legislation had to take place within the message itself.

7

THE COLLECTION OF THE QUR’AAN

THE ERA OF THE PROPHET (ﷺ) 609-632 CE

The Qur’aan was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in sections throughout the twenty-three years of his prophethood. Whenever a problem arose or whenever Allaah wanted to give the Prophet (ﷺ) and his follower’s special advice, Allaah would send angel Jibreel with a part of the Qur’aan, which he would recite to the Prophet (ﷺ). Thus, the Qur’aan was not revealed all at once in its complete form like the earlier books of revelation, but in parts over a period of time.

Preservation of the Qur’aan

When Jibreel first recited a part of the Qur’aan to the Prophet (ﷺ), the Prophet (ﷺ) tried to repeat it after him, word for word. Allaah later had Jibreel tell him not to do so. He was told instead to listen to the Qur’aan carefully. When the Prophet (ﷺ) did that, Allaah caused him to be able to remember everything without any effort on his part. Allaah said in the Qur’aan,

﴿ لَا تُحَرِّكۡ بِهِۦ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعۡجَلَ بِهِۦٓ ١٦ إِنَّ عَلَيۡنَا جَمۡعَهُۥ
وَقُرۡءَانَهُۥ ١٧ فَإِذَا قَرَأۡنَٰهُ فَٱتَّبِعۡ قُرۡءَانَهُۥ ١٨ ﴾

"Do not move your tongue to hastily (learn) it. Surely I will collect and recite it. So, when I recite it, follow its recital."[68]

It was very important that the Prophet (ﷺ) remember all that was revealed to him, because he could neither read nor write.

The Prophet (ﷺ) passed on all of the Qur'aan to his companions before he died. He used a number of different ways to make sure that they memorized and recorded it exactly as he learned it.

1. The Prophet (ﷺ) used to recite aloud various parts of the Qur'aan in the *salaahs* (congregational prayers). In that way, his followers used to hear parts of the Qur'aan daily.[69]
2. Everyone who entered Islaam would be taught parts of the Qur'aan that they would have to use in their daily prayers. Thus, Muslims were always learning or teaching various parts of the Qur'aan.
3. The Prophet (ﷺ) informed his followers that the best of them were those who learned and taught the Qur'aan. This encouraged them to make even greater efforts to memorize the Qur'aan and teach it to others.
4. Those who were able to read and write were told by the Prophet (ﷺ) to write down the various sections of the Qur'aan as they were revealed. The Prophet (ﷺ) would tell them the order in which they should record the verses. Al-Baraa' ibn 'Aazib stated that when the verse, **"Those believers who sit (at home) are not equal with those who strive,"** was revealed, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Call So-and-so." He came with an inkpot and a wooden board or a shoulder blade. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Write: **'Those believers who sit (at home) are not equal with those who strive in the cause of Allaah...'** "[70]

Because there was no paper in Arabia at that time, the Qur'aan was written down on anything that was available. The companions wrote the verses of the Qur'aan

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[68] *Soorah al-Qiyaamah* (75):16-18.

[69] Umm Hishaam bint Haarithah reported that she memorized *Soorah Qaaf* simply from hearing the Prophet (ﷺ) recite it during the *khutbah* on Fridays. (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 412, nos. 1893-4.)

[70] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):95. The *hadeeth* was collected by al-Bukhaaree, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 95, no. 118.

on date palm leaves, flat stones, tree bark, wood, dried animal skins, and even the shoulder blades of sheep or camels. Thus, the verses of the Qur'aan were preserved in the hearts of Muslims, as well as written down, during the lifetime of the Prophet (ﷺ). Since people entered Islaam at various points during the Prophet's mission, only a few of them heard all of the Qur'aan directly from the Prophet (ﷺ). Some companions were able to memorize better than others. So, even though all of them memorized portions of the Qur'aan, only a few were able to memorize all of the Qur'aan during the Prophet's lifetime.

When the Prophet (ﷺ) died in the year 632 CE, the whole of the Qur'aan was not written down in one complete book. It was recorded on various pieces of writing material and kept in the possession of different followers of the Prophet (ﷺ). Each had sections, but none of them had all of it. Because of the fact that the verses of the Qur'aan continued to be revealed up until a few months before the Prophet's death, the companions were more concerned with recording and memorizing than putting it all together in one book. Consequently, the gathering of the Qur'aan into one text was not done during the lifetime of the Prophet (ﷺ).

THE ERA OF ABOO BAKR 632-634 CE/11-13 AH

After the death of the Prophet (ﷺ), there arose three main groups opposed to Islaam in the Arabian peninsula:

1. The first group was made up of those who decided that they did not want to pay the Islaamic tax, *zakaah*, to anyone other than the Prophet (ﷺ). They did not feel that *zakaah* was a pillar of Islaam like *salaah, sawm* and hajj. They instead looked at *zakaah* as a tribute; a kind of tax paid to the one who conquered them. So, when the Prophet (ﷺ) died, they felt that they were no longer required to pay it. When Aboo Bakr became the leader of the Muslim state, this group refused to pay the *zakaah* and sent armies to the capital, Madeenah, in order to topple the Muslim state. They demanded to be excused from paying *zakaah*, or else they would attack and destroy the centers of Islaam.[71]
2. The first group was joined by those who had entered Islaam in order to escape defeat, as well as those who simply wanted to be on the winning side. This group did not believe in Allaah and His Messenger at all. They wanted to

[71] See *al-Bidaayah wa an-Nihaayah*, vol. 6, p. 380.

destroy Islaam so they could be free to do whatever they wanted to do. Since the armies of those who refused to pay *zakaah* appeared strong, many of these hypocrites joined them.

3. The third group was made up of a number of false prophets and prophetesses and their followers. In Najd, in the region of Yamaamah, an Arab from the tribe of Banoo Haneefah named Musaylamah claimed prophethood. In the southern part of Arabia, another Arab from the tribe of 'Ans called al-Aswad claimed prophethood and took over Najraan and Yemen. In northern Arabia a woman named Sajaah from the Banoo Tameem tribe also claimed prophethood and rose in arms against the Muslim state.[72] These false prophets all invited people to leave Islaam by claiming that Allaah had revealed new laws to them making allowable most of the things which were forbidden by Allaah through Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

True Muslims under the leadership of Caliph Aboo Bakr were forced to fight these three groups in order to reestablish Islaam throughout the Arabian peninsula.

The First Writing

During these wars, known as the *Riddah* (apostasy), many of those who had memorized large portions of the Qur'aan were killed.[73] Those Muslims who had a lot of Qur'aan in their hearts knew well the rewards which Allaah has promised those who fight for Islaam, so they would always be in the front lines of all the battles.

'Umar ibn al-Khattaab realized the danger of what was happening and feared that if something was not done immediately, the Qur'aan would be lost to future generations of Muslims. He went to Caliph Aboo Bakr and advised him to have the whole Qur'aan written down in one book in order to preserve it from being lost. Aboo Bakr at first refused to do so, as the Prophet (ﷺ) had not told them to do it. He was afraid of bringing anything new into the religion, because the Prophet (ﷺ) had warned them about changing the religion. He knew that the Christians had gone astray before them by changing the religion which Prophet 'Eesaa had brought after he left them, so Aboo Bakr was very much against making any changes in the religion as it had been left by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). However, after thinking over the situation carefully, he came to realize that 'Umar's advice was right and that it was not really a change in the religion. The

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[72] See *al-Bidaayah wa an-Nihaayah*, vol. 6, pp. 376-9, 391-3..

[73] See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 477, no. 509.

Prophet (ﷺ) had ordered them to write down the various verses and chapters of the Qur'aan while it was being revealed in order to help preserve it. Compiling all of what was written into one complete book was then only the completion of what the Prophet (ﷺ) had begun.

Caliph Aboo Bakr asked Zayd ibn Thaabit to be in charge of collecting and writing down the whole Qur'aan. Zayd refused to do it at first for the same reasons Aboo Bakr had, but after some time he also came to realize that it was right.[74] Zayd was chosen for this task for the following reasons:

1. He was one of the best reciters of the Qur'aan.[75]
2. He was one of the few who had memorized the whole Qur'aan during the lifetime of the Prophet (ﷺ).[76]
3. He was one of those whom the Prophet (ﷺ) asked to write down the Qur'aan.[77]
4. He was one of the few who were present when the Prophet (ﷺ) recited the whole Qur'aan during the last Ramadaan of his life.[78]

Zayd began the process by collecting all of the materials on which the Qur'aan had been written. He then gathered around him all of those who had also memorized all of the Qur'aan or large portions of it. He then compared what was written down with what he and the others had memorized. If all agreed, he would then write it down on pages of leather.[79] In this way the whole Qur'aan was written down during the reign of the first Caliph. On its completion Zayd turned it over to Caliph Aboo Bakr, who kept it until his death two years after he had become Caliph.

Just before his death, Aboo Bakr turned over the Qur'aan to 'Umar, whom he had chosen to be the second Caliph. 'Umar kept his copy of the Qur'aan with him until his death, ten years later, at the hand of an assassin named Aboo Lu'lu'.[80] The Qur'aan was then turned over to his daughter Hafsah, who was one of the

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[74] See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 477-8, no. 509.
[75] See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, p. 199.
[76] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 488, no. 525.
[77] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 94-5, nos. 116-7.
[78] As-Suyootee quotes al-Baghawee's statement to that effect in *Sharh as-Sunnah* as well as a statement by Ibn Seereen that would support that, collected by Ibn Abee Shaybah in *Kitaabah al-Masaahif*. See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, p. 142.
[79] See *Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmithee*, vol. 3, p. 59, no. 2479.
[80] See *al-Bidaayah wa an-Nihaayah*, vol. 7, p.166.

Prophet's widows. Hafsah kept the Qur'aan in her house in Madeenah, but she made it available to anyone who wanted to make copies from it or check the accuracy of what they had memorized.[81]

THE ERA OF 'UTHMAAN 644-656 CE/23-35 AH

After the death of the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab, a committee made up of six of the most famous companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) chose 'Uthmaan ibn 'Affaan to be the third caliph.

During the reign of Caliph 'Umar (634-644 CE/13-23 AH), the Islaamic state had expanded beyond the borders of the Arabian peninsula into Egypt, Syria and 'Iraaq. In the subsequent reign of Caliph 'Uthmaan, the expansion continued on into Persia, India, Russia, China, Turkey and across North Africa. Many of the people of these regions accepted Islaam and learned the recitation of the Qur'aan from the early Muslims. The Qur'aan was revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) in seven different Arabian dialects, and the early Muslims taught the Qur'aan in its different readings.

The Second Writing

In the Muslim provinces, some Arabs began to boast that their dialect was superior to that of the others. Also, when new Muslims made mistakes in their recitation of the Qur'aan, it was sometimes difficult to tell whether it was really an error or whether it was one of the seven reading which had been taught by the Prophet (ﷺ). These problems eventually became a source of confusion in the Muslim provinces outside of Arabia. One of the *sahaabah* by the name of Huthayfah ibn al-Yamaan noticed the confusion while he was in 'Iraaq, and feared that it might lead to a breakup of the Muslim nation and the changing of the Qur'aan. On his return to the capital, he informed Caliph 'Uthmaan of what he had heard and seen. Caliph 'Uthmaan realized the seriousness of the situation and called the major *sahaabah* together in order to find a solution to the problem. They decided to make official copies of the Qur'aan from the one compiled in Caliph Aboo Bakr's time and limit the people to its recitation. 'Uthmaan asked Hafsah for the original copy of the Qur'aan and called on Zayd ibn Thaabit to

[81] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 163-4, no. 201.

head a committee of four Qur'aanic scholars who would take on the task of making the official copies.[82]

When the copies were completed, the original was returned to Hafsah. A total of seven copies were made and one was sent to Makkah, another to Syria, one to Basrah, one to Koofah, one to Yemen, one to Bahrayn, and one was kept in the capital, Madeenah.[83] Apparently, different copies were written by different members of the committee.[84] Caliph 'Uthmaan sent an official reciter of the Qur'aan with each copy in order to clear up any problems which might later arise.[85] He also ordered that all other copies of the Qur'aan be destroyed, as people had made notes on their personal copies and some copies were incomplete.[86] All new copies were then made from the official copy, called *Mus-haf 'Uthmaan.* In that way the Qur'aan was saved from any kind of change or loss. This process was completed in the year 646 CE, two years after 'Uthmaan became the new Caliph.

Where are the original *Mus-hafs* Now?

The Madeenan *Mus-haf* was kept in the Prophet's Mosque. A reference to it appears in contemporary accounts of a fire in the Mosque in 654 AH which caused extensive damage. The *mus-haf* was, however, saved. Some reports suggest that it was transferred to Istanbul by the Turks during World War I, but it is now lost.[87]

The Syrian *mus-haf* was kept in the *Jaami' Masjid* in Damascus. Ibn Katheer (d. 774 AH) mentioned seeing it, as did Ibn Batootah (d. 779 AH) and Ibn Jazaree (d. 833 CE/1430 AH). It was kept locked up, but was brought out for public viewing after *Jumu'ah* prayers. A fire in 1892 CE/1310 AH destroyed the *masjid*, and the *mus-haf* perished with it. A handwritten copy of it made shortly before its destruction was also transferred to Istanbul during WWI.[88]

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[82] See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 478-9, no. 510 and *Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmithee*, vol. 3, pp. 59-60, no. 2480.
[83] *Al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, p. 172.
[84] *Ma' al-Masaahif*, p. 99.
[85] Ibid. pp. 97-8.
[86] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 478-9, no. 510.
[87] *Ma' al-Masaahif*, p. 113.
[88] *Ma' al-Masaahif*, p. 113

An early manuscript on gazelle parchment exists in Dar al-Kutub as-Sultaaneeyah in Egypt. It is written in Kufic script without dots or vowel markings. It had been previously kept in the oldest mosque in Cairo, Masjid 'Amr Ibn al-'Aas. It was brought there in 347 AH by a man from 'Iraaq, who claimed it was the *mus-haf* that 'Uthmaan was reading when he was killed. This information was reported by the historian al-Maqrizee, writing in 378 AH. There was scepticism about the claim even at that time. There are bloodstains on some of the pages, but many ancient Qur'aanic manuscripts had blood applied to them to support the claim that they were the *mus-haf* of 'Uthmaan.[89]

There is a manuscript in Tashkent that seems to be the best candidate for the claim to be one of the copies com-missioned by 'Uthmaan. It was purchased during the late Middle Ages by a Muslim ruler in Central Asia, but eventually fell into the hands of the Russians when they conquered the country. They took it to St. Petersburg, but after the Bolshevik revolu-tion, in 1923, it was returned to Samarqand. In the 1940s it was transferred to Tashkent, which is where it is today.[90] Soviet authorities allowed Muslim scholars to photograph that manu-script. Hyderabad House in Philadelphia published a copy of it, side by side with the modern Arabic text with the added dots and vowel markings.

The same principles of analysis that were applied to Bible manuscripts by Bible scholars, and which exposed its many flaws and changes, have been applied to Qur'aanic manuscripts gathered from around the world. Ancient manu-scripts from all periods of Islaamic history found in the Library of Congress in Washington, the Chester Beatty Museum in Dublin, Ireland and at the London Museum have been compared with those in museums in Tashkent, Turkey and Egypt. The result of all such studies confirm that there has not been any change in the text from its original writing. For example, the "*Institute fur Koranforschung*" of the University of Munich, Germany, collected and collated over 42,000 complete or incomplete copies of the Qur'aan. After some fifty years of study, they reported that in terms of differences between the various copies, there were no variants, except occasional mistakes of copyists, which could easily be ascertained. The institute was destroyed by American bombs during the Second World War.[91]

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[89] Ibid., p. 114
[90] Ibid., p. 117
[91] *Muhammad Rasullullah,* p. 179.

MEMORIZATION OF THE QUR'AAN

Scholars differ on the total number of *sahaabah* who had memorized all of the Qur'aan and read it back to the Prophet (ﷺ) before his death. Imaam Al-Bukhaaree collected in his *Saheeh* a statement of Anas ibn Maalik that only four people had gathered the whole Qur'aan in the Prophet's lifetime: Aboo ad-Dardaa', Mu'aath ibn Jabal, Zayd ibn Thaabit and Aboo Zayd.[92] Scholars agree that the apparent limitation in Anas's statement is either not what he intended or, if he did intend it, that it was not accurate. It seems he made this statement in the course of a friendly argument between members of the two tribes of the Ansaar about the virtues of each tribe. The individuals Anas named were all from the Khazraj tribe to which he belonged, and he meant to say that no one from the Aws tribe had memorized all of it.[93] There are two versions of this statement. The other version simply states that four people memorized the whole Qur'aan, without saying they were the only ones, and it mentions Ubayy ibn Ka'b in place of Aboo ad-Dardaa'.[94]

In another report collected by al-Bukhaaree, the Prophet (ﷺ) instructed his companions to learn the Qur'aan from Ibn Mas'ood, Saalim, the freed slave of Aboo Huthayfah, Mu'aath and Ubayy.[95] Other authentic evidence indicates that Aboo Bakr and 'Abdullaah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Aas had memorized all of it.[96] However, there are two *hadeeths* reported by al-Bukhaaree to indicate that the number was higher than that. In the incident of Bi'r Ma'oonah, seventy *sahaabah,* all of them *qurraa',* were ambushed and killed.[97] The word *qurraa'* is the plural of *qaaree',* which is used for a memorizer of the Qur'aan who is proficient in reciting it, although the *sahaabah* seem to have also used the term for one who is knowledgeable about its meanings. Seventy of the *sahaabah* who had memorized the whole Qur'aan, most of them from the Ansaar, died fighting in the battle of

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[92] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 488-9, no. 526.
[93] See *Fat-h al-Baaree*, vol. 8, pp. 668-9.
[94] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 488, no. 525.
[95] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 486-7, no. 521.
[96] Ibn Hajar deduced that Aboo Bakr was a *haafith* from the fact that the Prophet (ﷺ) appointed him to lead the *salaah* when he himself was too ill to do so, and he had earlier stated that the imaam in *salaah* should be the most proficient in Qur'aan. See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, pp. 364-5, no. 646, and *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 326, nos. 1417-20. The Prophet (ﷺ) instructed 'Abdullaah not to finish reciting the whole Qur'aan in less than seven days. See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 516-7, no. 572.
[97] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 5, pp. 287-8, no. 416.

Yamaamah only two years after the death of the Prophet (ﷺ).[98] If they had not completed their memorization of it before his death, they must have done so for a substantial portion of it.

Some people have tried to argue on the basis of Anas's statement collected by al-Bukhaaree that the number of people who memorized the Qur'aan during the lifetime of the Prophet (ﷺ) was too small to support the Muslim claim that the Qur'aan was conveyed to us by *tawaatur*.[99] Even if we accept this report at face value, its use to support that argument is not strong, because, although the number of people who had memorized the whole Qur'aan in the Prophet's lifetime may have been limited, many others had memorized substantial, overlapping portions. So during his lifetime the number of memorizers was great for any given portion of the Qur'aan. Many of these completed their memorization of it after his death. In fact, with every succeeding generation of Muslims, the numbers of those who memorized all of the Qur'aan has increased. Today there are literally hundreds of thousands of Muslims throughout the world who have done so.

There is no other book, religious or otherwise, which has been memorized on this scale in recorded history. The Qur'aan is about four-fifths the length of the New Testament of the Christians, yet not a single person in recorded history is known to have memorized the New Testament completely. In fact, if all of the books in the world were somehow destroyed, the only book which could be rewritten, word for word, without a single mistake is the Glorious Qur'aan.

One of the leading orientalists, Kenneth Cragg, said the following regarding the memorization and preservation of the Qur'aanic text, "This phenomenon of Qur'anic recital means that the text has traversed the centuries in an unbroken living sequence of devotion. It cannot, therefore, be handled as an antiquarian thing, nor as a historical document out of a distant past."[100] Another orientalist scholar, William Graham, wrote: "For countless millions of Muslims over more than fourteen centuries of Islamic history, 'scripture', *al-kitab*, has been a book learned, read and passed on by vocal repetition and memorisation. The written Qur'an may 'fix' visibly the authori-tative text of the Divine Word in a way unknown in history, but the authoritativeness of the Qur'anic book is only realised

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[98] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 477-8, no. 509.

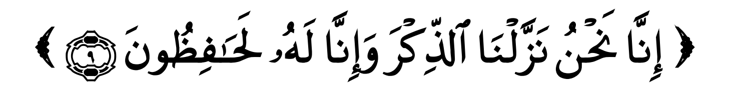
[99] *Tawaatur* is the transmission of a report by such a large number of narrators that they couldn't have gotten together to fabricate a lie nor could they all agree upon an errror.

[100] *The Mind of the Qur'an,* p. 26.

in its fullness and perfection when it is correctly recited."[101] Yet another, John Burton, stated: "The method of transmitting the Qur'an from one generation to the next by having the young memorise the oral tradition of their elders had mitigated somewhat from the beginning the worst perils of relying solely on written records..."[102] At the end of a voluminous work on the Qur'aan's collection, Burton stated that the text of the Qur'aan available today is "the text which has come down to us in the form in which it was organised and approved by the Prophet....What we have today in our hands is the *mus-haf*[103] of Muhammad."[104]

Significance of the Qur'aan's Preservation

Allaah promised in the Qur'aan that He would take on the responsibility of protecting His final word from loss. He said,



> **"Verily I have revealed the Reminder (Qur'aan), and verily I shall preserve it."**[105]

Thus, the Qur'aan has been preserved in both the oral as well as written form in a way no other religious book in history has.

Why did Allaah preserve the Qur'aan and allow His earlier books of divine revelation to be changed or lost? The answer to that question lies in the following three facts:

1. The earlier prophets and their books were sent to a particular people in particular periods of history. Once the period ended, a new prophet was sent with a new book to replace the previous book. So, it was not necessary that these books be preserved by Allaah. The preservation of the earlier books was left up to the people as a test for them. Thus, when the people went astray, they changed what was written in the books which their prophets brought in

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[101] *Beyond the Written Word,* p. 80.
[102] *An Introduction to the Hadith,* p. 27.
[103] The Arabic term used to refer to the text of the Qur'aan.
[104] *The Collection of the Qur'an,* p. 239-40.
[105] *Soorah al-Hijr* (15):9.

order to make allowable the things which were forbidden to them. In that way, all of the earlier books of revelation became either changed or lost.

2. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was the last prophet whom Allaah sent, and he was not sent to a particular people or a particular time. He was sent to all of mankind until the end of the world. Allaah said in the Qur'aan,

﴿ وَمَآ أَرۡسَلۡنَٰكَ إِلَّا كَآفَّةٗ لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرٗا وَنَذِيرٗا وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكۡثَرَ ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ٢٨ ﴾

"I have only sent you (Muhammad) as a giver of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind, but most men do not understand."[106]

Thus, his book of revelation, the Qur'aan, had to be specially preserved from any form of change or loss so that it would be available to all the generations of man until the last day of the world.

3. The Qur'aan was the main miracle given to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to prove that he was a true prophet of Allaah and not an imposter. So, the Qur'aan had to be saved to prove to the later generations that Muhammad (ﷺ) was really the last prophet of Allaah. All of the false prophets who came after Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) brought books which they claimed to be revealed from Allaah, but none of them have the miraculous ability to be memorized by thousands, nor have they improved on the message of the Qur'aan.

The significance of the Qur'aan's preservation is that Islaam has been kept in its original purity because of it. Humanity can always return to the sources of Islaam no matter what people may have added or forgotten in time. All of the essential principles of Islaam are to be found in the Qur'aan. Consequently, the preservation of the Qur'aan meant the preservation of Islaam in its final form. The loss of the Gospel of Jesus means that Christians can never return to the true teachings of Prophet Jesus except by accepting Islaam.[107] Similarly, the original Torah was lost when Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the

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[106] *Soorah Saba'* (34):28.
[107] See *The Five Gospels*, pp. 2-16.

Babylonians.[108] Thus, the Jews cannot return to the pure teachings of Prophet Moses except by following Islaam.

It is only in Islaam that the pure teachings of the prophets have been preserved without any change. That is why Allaah said in the Qur'aan,

﴿ إِنَّ ٱلدِّينَ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلۡإِسۡلَٰمُ ﴾

"Verily, the only acceptable religion to Allaah is Islaam."[109]

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[108] See *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 14, p. 757.
[109] *Soorah Aal 'Imraan* (3):19.

8

THE QUR’AANIC TEXT

Order of the Verses and Chapters

A verse of the Qur’aan is called an *“aayah,”* which literally means a sign or token by which a person or thing is known,[1] and a chapter is referred to as a *“soorah,”* which literally means enclosure or wall.[2] The order of the *aayahs* in each *soorah* was set by the Prophet (ﷺ) himself, as is indicated in a number of *hadeeths* (recorded sayings or actions of the Prophet [ﷺ]). For example, ‘Uthmaan ibn Abee al-‘Aas said, *“Once while I was sitting with Allaah’s Messenger (ﷺ), he rolled his eyes upwards in a stare, then after a while he lowered them and said,*

(أَتَانِي جِبْرِيلُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام فَأَمَرَنِي أَنْ أَضَعَ هَذِهِ الْآيَةَ بِهَذَا الْمَوْضِعِ مِنْ هَذِهِ السُّورَةِ .)

‘Jibreel came to me and ordered me to place this aayah *in this place in this* soorah*:*

﴿ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَأۡمُرُ بِٱلۡعَدۡلِ وَٱلۡإِحۡسَٰنِ وَإِيتَآيِٕ ذِي ٱلۡقُرۡبَىٰ ﴾

‘Verily Allaah commands justice, kindness, and charity to close relatives.”[3]

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[1] *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 135.

[2] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 1465.

[3] *Soorah an-Nahl* (16):90. The report was collected by Ahmad (no. 17240). It has Layth ibn Abee Sulaym ibn Zunaym in the *isnaad*. Ibn Hajar said about him, “He was *sadooq* (truthful) but he became very befuddled (in his old age) and his *hadeeth* could not be sorted out, so they abandoned him.” However, Muslim relies on him when his reports corroborate others. (See *Taqreeb at-Tahtheeb*, p. 464, no. 5685.) Ahmad reports in another *hadeeth* that ‘Uthmaan told Ibn ‘Abbaas,

The Prophet (ﷺ) also made reference to *aayahs* in particular positions in *soorahs.* For example, Aboo ad-Dardaa' reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

(مَنْ حَفِظَ عَشْرَ آيَاتٍ مِنْ أَوَّلِ سُورَةِ الْكَهْفِ عُصِمَ مِنَ الدَّجَّالِ .)

"*Whoever memorizes the first ten verses of* Soorah al-Kahf *will be protected from* Ad-Dajjaal *(the Anti-Christ).*"[4]

Also, 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab mentioned during a sermon that he had been confused about a problem of inheritance related to a person who dies without parents or children to inherit from him. He kept asking the Prophet (ﷺ) about it, until he became annoyed, prodded him in the chest and said,

(أَلاَ تَكْفِيكَ آيَةُ الصَّيْفِ الَّتِي فِي آخِرِ سُورَةِ النِّسَاءِ ؟)

"*Isn't the verse (revealed) in the summer, the one at the end of* Soorah an-Nisaa', *enough for you?*"[5]

If the order of the verses was not fixed, these *hadeeths,* and others like them, which attach special benefits for particular verses would be meaningless. There are also numerous authentic reports in which the Prophet (ﷺ) recited *soorahs* with the verses in order during *salaah* (prayer), *Jumu'ah* sermons, etc.

During the second copying of the Qur'aan, Caliph 'Uthmaan personally checked the position of each *aayah* in every *soorah*, making sure that every one was in place, even if they were abrogated verses. Ibn az-Zubayr reported that he said to Caliph 'Uthmaan, "The verse: '**And those of you who die, leaving wives behind...**'[6] has been canceled by the other *aayah,* so why are you having it written

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"*Soorahs* were revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) over a period of time. Whenever something would be revealed to him, he would call one of his scribes and tell him, 'Place this in the *soorah* that mentions such-and-such.' (*Musnad Ahmad*, nos. 376 and 468.) The *hadeeth* was also collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 1, pp. 201-2, no. 785) and at-Tirmithee and has seven *isnaads*, all containing Yazeed al-Faarisee, who was classified as *maqbool* (acceptable for corroborative reports) by Ibn Hajar. (See *Taqreeb at-Tahtheeb*, p. 606, no. 7796.) The rest of the narrators are highly reliable. The *hadeeth* is thus weak by itself, but it may be used where it corroborates another report, such as the *hadeeth* of 'Uthmaan ibn Abee al-'Aas.

[4] Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, pp. 386-7, no. 1766) and Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 3, p.1203, no. 4309).

[5] *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 854, no. 3937.

[6] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):240.

[or why are you allowing it to stay written]?" He replied, "O my nephew, I will not remove anything from its original place."[7]

Similarly, the order of the *soorahs* was fixed by the Prophet (ﷺ) himself, although it is recorded that 'Alee ibn Abee Taalib had compiled a text in which the *soorahs* were ordered according to the time of their revelation. That is, it began with *Soorah al-'Alaq,* then *al-Mudath-thir,* and then *Noon.* It has also been recorded that Ibn Mas'ood had a text which began with *Soorah al-Baqarah,* then *an-Nisaa',* and then *Aal'Imraan*; while Ubayy had one which began with *Soorah al-Faatihah,* then *al-Baqarah, an-Nisaa',* and *Aal 'Imraan.*[8] However, none of these great companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) argued with the order confirmed by Caliph 'Uthmaan and the committee of *sahaabah* that copied and distributed copies of the Qur'aan to the various centers of the Muslim state. In fact, these and other companions burned their copies in order to avoid any confu-sion.[9] None of this would have taken place if the order of the *soorahs* was not fixed.

It should also be noted that Jibreel reviewed the Qur'aan once during every Ramadaan of the Prophet's life except during the final year, in which he recited it to him twice.[10] For such a review to be of any value, a fixed order had to have been there, especially considering the fact that some of the *sahaabah* used to listen to the Prophet (ﷺ) as he recited it to Jibreel.

THE 'UTHMAANEE SCRIPT

There is nothing recorded from the Prophet (ﷺ) to indicate that the script used to copy the Qur'aan during Caliph 'Uthmaan's era was fixed. Caliph 'Uthmaan told the scribes to write it according to the Qurayshee dialect if any difference arose in spelling. Hence, when Zayd ibn Thaabit differed with the other three Qurayshee scribes over the word *taaboot*, and Zayd wanted to write it تابوة

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[7] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 40, no. 53.

[8] See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, pp. 181-3, and *Ma' al-Masaahif,* pp. 81-7.

[9] See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, pp. 170-1. As-Suyootee quotes a report he classified as authentic, which was collected by Ibn Abee Daawood in *Kitaab al-Masaahif,* that after'Uthmaan's death, 'Alee defended his reputation from people who tagged him "the *mus-haf* burner," explaining that he did so only after consulting the leading companions and receiving their approval.

[10] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 486, no. 519.

(taabooh), 'Uthmaan said, "Write it تابوت *(taaboot)*, for verily, the Qur'aan was revealed according to the Qurayshee dialect."[11]

However, the majority of scholars considered it preferable that the original spelling be maintained in order to protect the Qur'aan from changes which might result from the evolution of writing rules with the passage of time. These rules also vary from country to country, which could have led to disunity and discord over the very text of the Qur'aan. Hence, when Imaam Maalik was asked whether the Qur'aan could be written according to the dictation rules of his time, he replied, "No, it should only be written according to the way that it was originally written."[12]

Other scholars, such as Qaadee al-Baaqillaanee (died 1013 CE/403 AH) and Ibn Khaldoon (died 1405 CE/808 AH), considered it permissible to write the Qur'aan according to the rules of standard Arabic, from which the *'Uthmaanee Mus-haf* differs slightly. Al-Baaqillaanee argued that for someone to insist upon writing the Qur'aan according to a specific set of written symbols requires a proof from the Qur'aan and *Sunnah*, and there is no such proof. He also mentioned that some of the prominent *sahaabah* had *mus-hafs* which differed from the writing system employed in the *'Uthmaanee Mus-haf*.[13] Ibn Khaldoon (died 1406 CE/808 AH) argued that the *sahaabah* wrote the *'Uthmaanee Mus-haf* at a time when the rules of Arabic writing had not yet been standardized, therefore there is no need to stick to their writing where it differs from what became the accepted norm. Al-'Izz ibn 'Abdis-Salaam (died 1282 CE/660 AH) held the position that it was obligatory to write the *mus-haf* which ordinary people read according to standard Arabic in order to protect the ignorant from falling into errors of recitation that change the meaning. Those who see the permissibility of this change point out that what people are reading today and calling the *'Uthmaanee Mus-haf* is really quite different from the way the *'Uthmaanee Mus-haf* originally looked. The changes were all made for one purpose: to make it easier for the average Muslim to recite the Qur'aan easily and correctly.[14] The defenders of the *'Uthmaanee Mus-haf* point out that the *sahaabah* wrote it in such a way as to accomodate the greatest number of variant authentic recitations, and that writing it according to modern standard Arabic would make some of the variants impossible to reconcile with the script.

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[11] Collected by at-Tirmithee and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmithee*, vol. 3, pp. 60, no. 2480.

[12] Reported by Ash-hab and collected by Abu 'Amr ad-Daanee in *Al-Muqni'*. Quoted by as-Suyootee in *al-Itqaan*, vol. 4, p. 146.

[13] *Lamahaat fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, pp. 133-4.

[14] *Lamahaat fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, p. 135.

The Qur'aanic texts of 'Uthmaan's era were written without dashes (*tashkeel*, i.e. *fat-hah*, *kasrah* and *dammah*) to indicate the vowels and without dots (*nuqat*) to distinguish between look-alike letters (e.g. *Seen* and *Sheen*, *Saad* and *Daad*, etc.) The verses were not numbered, nor were there any punctuation signs to indicate pauses or even the ending of verses. The following is an example of some Qur'aanic verses written during that era:

All the literate Arab Muslims of those days possessed a natural grasp of the language which enabled them to read texts written in this simple form without any difficulty. However, when non-Arabs began to accept Islaam and learn Arabic, errors in the recitation of the Qur'aan began to appear, due to their unfamiliarity with the language. This became especially noticeable in the province of Iraq. In fact, it is reported that once the grammarian, Abul-Aswad ad-Du'alee (d. 638 CE), heard someone recite the phrase "rasooluh" in the following verse as "rasoolih."

﴿ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ بَرِيٓءٞ مِّنَ ٱلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ وَرَسُولُهُۥ ﴾

"*Annal-laaha baree-um minal-mushrikeena wa rasooluh*"

"Verily, Allaah and His Messenger are free from (any obligation) to the idolaters."[15]

This minute change in recitation of a *kasrah* instead of a *dammah,* which could not be distinguished in the written text caused the verse to mean instead: "Verily Allaah is free from (any obligation) to the idolaters and His messenger." Ziyaad, the governor of al-Basrah, had previously requested ad-Du'alee to develop some signs by which the masses could more easily read the Qur'aan. Ad-Du'alee had delayed responding to the governor's request for fear of introducing an un-Islamic innovation. However, this recitational error shook him to such a degree that shortly after that incident, he developed the first set of marks to indicate the vowelling of the Arabic text.[16] The *fat-hah* (the short vowel "a") was indicated by a dot above the beginning of the letter, *kasrah* (the short vowel "i") was indicated by a dot below the beginning of the letter, and *dammah* (the short vowel "u") was indicated by a dot at the end of the letter, between it and the following letter if they were joined. *Sukoon* (indicating the end of a syllable on a consonant) was represented by two dots.[17] An example of a text from that period follows:

8cm X 4cm

Later on, dots were added to distinguish between look-alike letters, and vowel signs evolved from the letters related to them. For example, *fat-hah* evolved from the *alif* and became a straight line above the letter; the *kasrah*

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[15] *Soorah at-Tawbah* (9):3.

[16] *Manaahil al-'Irfaan*, vol. 1, p. 401.

[17] *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, pp.150-51.

evolved from the *yaa'* and became a line below the letter; and *dammah* evolved from the *waaw* and became a tiny *waaw* written near the end of the letter.

Decoration of the Text

In the third century after the *Hijrah* (9th century C.E.), calligraphers began competing with each other in the beautification of the Qur'aan. A number of flowery scripts evolved and a variety of distinguishing marks appeared. It was during this period that the sign " ّ ", indicating a doubled consonant (*tashdeed*), first came into use.

Following that, calligraphers began the practice of writing the name of the *soorah* and the number of verses in it at the beginning of each *soorah*. Since the Prophet (ﷺ) only mentioned a few of the *soorahs* by name and it was the practice among the *sahaabah* to entitle the *soorahs* according to the introductory phrases (e.g. *Soorah Ara'ayta* is now known as *Soorah Maa'oon*), a variety of names for the same *soorah* became common. Signs indicating the beginning and ending of verses, signs showing the division of the Qur'aan according to *juz'* (one of 30 parts), *hizb* (half a *juz'*) or *rukoo'*, as well as a variety of punctuation marks, were added to the text during this period.[18]

The scholars of the time were opposed to these additions, fearing interpolations (additions to the main text). They based their opposition also on the statement of the *sahaabee* Ibn Mas'ood, "Keep the Qur'aan free from additions and do not mix anything with it."[19] Most scholars, however, were not against the dots and dashes to indicate vowelling and differentiate between look-alike letters, as these had become a real necessity for correct recitation and protection of the Qur'aanic text from distortion. Al-Hasan al-Basree, Ibn Seereen, and Rabee'ah (scholars among the students of the *sahaabah*) were all reported to have said that the *nuqtah* (dots for distinguishing look-alike letters) and *tashkeel* (vowel markings) were acceptable.[20] In time, the widespread additions and decorations of calligraphers became so commonplace that the early objections of the scholars were forgotten. The Qur'aanic texts of today are clear evidence that the opposition of the scholars was ignored, but the feared interpolation of decorative additions has not occurred, due mainly to the continuing tradition

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[18] See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 4, pp. 161-62.

[19] *Musannaf 'Abdur-Razzaaq*, vol. 4, pp. 322-3, no. 7944.

[20] *Musannaf 'Abdur-Razzaaq*, vol. 4, pp. 323-4, no. 7948. Ibn Seereen seems to have changed his mind on the issue, as 'Abdur-Razzaaq has reported that he also expressed disapproval of this practice.

among Muslims of memorizing the whole text of the Qur'aan in its original purity.

9

DIALECTS AND RECITATIONS

Although Arabic was the common language throughout the Arabian peninsula, the different environments and histories of the various tribes produced a wide variety of dialects. In some cases, each tribe used different words to describe the same object. For example, some tribes called the lion an *"asad,"* while other tribes called it a *"layth," "hamzah," "hafs,"* or a *"ghadanfar."* In other cases, differences occurred in the way certain letters were pronounced due to vowelling differences. However, in time the dialect of the tribe of Quraysh emerged from among the various dialects as the most prominent dialect. The Qurayshee dialect became the most respected of all the dialects for the following basic reasons:

1. Makkah and its surrounding area, including the shrine of the *Ka'bah,* were part of the tribal lands of the Quraysh. Each of the various tribes had idols representing their various tribal gods placed in and around the *Ka'bah.* Thus the *Ka'bah* was considered the spiritual center for all of the Arabian tribes, and pilgrimage to the shrine was made throughout the year.

2. During the month of hajj, pilgrims from all of the tribes used to come to Makkah in order to perform the rites of hajj. This practice was started by Prophet Ibraheem and his sons when they first built the *Ka'bah* and it remained a practice among their Arabian descendants; however, many false rituals involving idolatry and superstition were added to the original rites. The Quraysh took personal responsibility for supplying drinking water (*siqaayah*) for all of the pilgrims and their animals. This was done free of charge as evidence of their generosity and nobility. Thus, the Quraysh were held in a highly praiseworthy position among the Arabs.

3. Makkah stood at the junction of all the major trade routes between Syria and Persia to the north, and Yemen and Africa to the south. As a result, the Qurayshee trading class became the richest class among the families in Arabia, which in turn led to the great respect that was given to the Qurayshee tribe by the various tribes of Arabia.

SAB'AH AHRUF (THE SEVEN FORMS)

In order to take into account the various differences which existed among the Arabian dialects, Allaah revealed the Qur'aan in seven different forms. The forms matched the dialects of the following seven tribes: Quraysh, Huthayl, Thaqeef, Hawaazin, Kinaanah, Tameem, and Yemen.[21] These various forms did not represent different Qur'aans, as Jibreel only conveyed verses from a single Qur'aan written on a protected tablet (*al-Lawh al-Mahfooth*) in the heavens. However, Jibreel was instructed to recite the verses that he brought in seven forms corresponding to the dialects of the major tribes. The various forms represented the various ways in which the same word might be said according to the various dialects. However, the meanings were all stated the same. The Prophet (ﷺ) informed most of his companions (*sahaabah*) of the existence of various readings so that the variation in their readings would not create any discord or division among them. The *sahaabee* Ibn 'Abbaas reported that he heard Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) say,

(أَقْرَأَنِي جِبْرِيلُ عَلَى حَرْفٍ فَرَاجَعْتُهُ فَلَمْ أَزَلْ أَسْتَزِيدُهُ وَيَزِيدُنِي حَتَّى انْتَهَى إِلَى سَبْعَةِ أَحْرُفٍ .)

"Jibreel recited (the Qur'aan) to me in one form, and after I had revised it I asked him to recite some more, which he did, until he completed seven forms."[22]

However, not all of the companions were aware of the various readings at the same time. Consequently, some minor disagreements did take place, which were resolved by the Prophet (ﷺ) himself. An example of such cases can be found in

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[21] Exactly which dialects is a matter of dispute among those who accept this interpretation of the seven *ahruf*. See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, p. 135-6.

[22] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 481, no. 513) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 390, no. 1785).

the following incident narrated by one of the Prophet's closet companions. 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab said, "Once during the lifetime of Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ), I heard Hishaam ibn Hakeem reciting *Soorah al-Furqaan* in *salaah*, and I noticed that he recited it differently from the way in which the Prophet (ﷺ) had taught me. I was on the verge of jumping on him during his *salaah*, but I managed to control my anger until he completed his prayer. Upon its completion, I grabbed him by the neck of his cloak and said, 'Who taught you this *soorah* that I heard you reciting?' He replied, 'Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) taught it to me!' I said, 'You are a liar, for Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) has taught it to me in a different way from the way you recited it!' I then dragged him to Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) and said to him, 'I heard this person reciting *Soorah al-Furqaan* in a different way from the way that you taught me.' Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) then said, *'Release him 'Umar! Recite Hishaam!'* Hishaam recited in the same way that I heard him reciting previously. Then the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) said, *'It was revealed in this way!'* He then said, *'Recite 'Umar!'* When I completed reciting it the way he had taught me, he said,

(هَكَذَا أُنْزِلَتْ . إِنَّ الْقُرْآنَ أُنْزِلَ عَلَى سَبْعَةِ أَحْرُفٍ فَاقْرَءُوا مِنْهُ مَا تَيَسَّرَ .)

'It was also revealed in this way. This Qur'aan has been revealed in seven forms, so recite whichever is easiest for you.'"[23]

Ibn 'Abdul Barr argued on the basis of this incident that the interpretation of the seven forms as meaning seven tribal dialects is flawed, since 'Umar and Hishaam were both from the Qurayshee tribe. He interpreted it as meaning seven facets of harmonious meaning conveyed by varying words; for example, words like *halumma, t'aala,* and *aqbil*, which all mean 'come.' Ibn Hajr, after quoting him, offered the opinion that the two interpretations are not mutually contradictory. It may be that the variation consists of differing words for the same meanings and that the variations are from the dialects of seven Arabic tribes.

Ibn Qutaybah proposed a different interpretation of the seven forms:

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[23] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 482, no. 514) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, pp. 389-90, no. 1782). Similar *hadeeths* are reported on the authority of Ubay ibn Ka'b, 'Abdur-Rahmaan ibn 'Awf and Aboo Hurayrah. In fact, Ibn al-Jazaree collected the reports on this issue and found that nineteen of the *sahaabah* reported it. It is thus considered a *mutawaatir hadeeth* in its meaning.

1. variations in vowel markings, while the letters and meaning are unchanged; for example *laa yudaarra* and *laa yudaarru* in verse 282 of *Soorah al-Baqarah:*

﴿ وَلَا يُضَآرَّ كَاتِبٌ وَلَا شَهِيدٌ ﴾

“Neither the scribe nor the witness should be harmed.”

2. variations in the form of a verb; for example: *ba‘‘ada* and *baa‘id* in verse 19 of *Soorah Saba’:*

﴿ فَقَالُواْ رَبَّنَا بَٰعِدۡ بَيۡنَ أَسۡفَارِنَا ﴾

“They said, ‘Our Lord, make the stages between our journeys longer.’ ”

The variation in this example is in two aspects: between the past tense and the imperative and between the second form and the third form of the root, i.e. *fa‘‘ala* and *faa‘ala.*

3. variations in dots of letters that have the same basic shape; for example, *raa’* and *zaa’* in the words *nunshiruhaa* and *nunshizuhaa*, two variant wordings of verse 259 of *Soorah al-Baqarah:*

﴿ وَٱنظُرۡ إِلَى ٱلۡعِظَامِ كَيۡفَ نُنشِزُهَا ﴾

“And look at the bones (of your donkey), how We raise them up.”

The variant wording, *nunshiruhaa,* means ‘We restore them to life.’

4. variations due to substitution of one letter for another that is pronounced from a nearby location in the mouth or throat; for example *'ayn* and *haa’* both originate from the middle of the throat. In verse 29 of *Soorah al-Waaqi‘ah*, the word, *talhin* (banana trees or a kind of acacia tree) is also recited *tal‘in* (spadix of a palm tree).

5. variations due to the transposition of words in a phrase; for example, in verse 19 of *Soorah Qaaf,*

﴿ وَجَآءَتۡ سَكۡرَةُ ٱلۡمَوۡتِ بِٱلۡحَقِّ ﴾

"And the stupor of death will come in truth,"

a variant recitation attributed to Aboo Bakr is:

وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْحَقِّ بِالْمَوْتِ

"And the stupor (ordained by) al-Haqq (Allaah) will come, accompanied by death."

6. variations due to the addition or subtraction of letters or words; for example, in verses 1-3 of *Soorah al-Layl:*

﴿ وَٱلَّيۡلِ إِذَا يَغۡشَىٰ ۝١ وَٱلنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّىٰ ۝٢ وَمَا خَلَقَ ٱلذَّكَرَ وَٱلۡأُنثَىٰٓ ۝٣ ﴾

"By the night when it veils, and the day when it shines in brightness, and Him Who created the male and female..."

The recitation of Ibn Mas'ood and Aboo ad-Dardaa' omitted the first three words of verse 3, *wa maa khalaqa,* (and [by] Him Who created).

Some recitations added words to what is recorded in the *Mus-haf 'Uthmaan.* Al-Bukhaaree collected the statement of Ibn 'Abbaas, "When the verse was revealed,

(وَأَنذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ الأَقْرَبِينَ وَ رَهْطَكَ مِنْهُمُ الْمُخْلَصِينَ)

"Warn your clan of nearest relations, and (especially) the sincere among them,"

the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) went out, climbed atop the hill of as-Safaa and shouted..."[24] The verse referred to by Ibn 'Abbaas is verse 214 of *Soorah ash-Shu'araa'*. However, only the first half of it, "Warn your clan of nearest relations," appears in the *Mus-haf 'Uthmaan*. Some scholars say this is really an example of *naskh* (abrogated recitation).[25]

7. variations due to the use of one synonym in place of another. This is what Ibn 'Abdul Barr was referring to. An example of this is Ibn Mas'ood's recitation of verse 5 of *Soorah al-Qaari'ah*. Instead of **كَالْعِهْنِ الْمَنْفُوشِ**, he recited **كَالصُّوفِ الْمَنْفُوشِ.** Both phrases mean 'like carded wool.'[26]

Other scholars, such as Ibn al-Jazaree and Abul-Fadl ar-Raazee, proposed their own variations on the same principle. Ar-Raazee wrote, "The variations of language do not go outside seven aspects:

1. variations of nouns between singular, dual and plural and between masculine and feminine;
2. variations in verb tenses between perfect (past), imperfect (present and future) and imperative (command);
3. variations in *i'raab* (vowel endings that indicate the role of the word in the sentence);
4. addition and deletion of letters;
5. flipped word order;
6. substitution of one word for another;
7. variations in pronunciation such *al-imaalah, al-fat-h, at-tarqeeq, at-tafkheem, al-idghaam* and *al-ith-haar*.[27]

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[24] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 467, no. 495. Note: The translator did not translate the second half of the Qur'aanic reference cited in the Arabic.
[25] See Chapter 12.
[26] Quoted by Ibn Hajar in *Fat-h al-Baaree*, vol. 8, p. 645.
[27] Quoted by Ibn Hajar in *Fat-h al-Baaree*, vol. 8, p. 646. This view was favored by az-Zarqaanee in *Manaahil al- 'Irfaan*, vol. 1, p. 148.

Ibn Hajr pointed out that there is considerable overlap between all these various explanations.[28]

Significance of the Seven Forms

The revelation of the Qur'aan in seven different dialects made its recitation and memorization much easier for the various tribes. For example, the phrase, "*'alayhim*" (on them), was read by some as "*'alayhumoo,*" and the word "*siraat*" (path, bridge), was read by some as "*siraat*" and by others as "*ziraat,*" and the word "*mu'min*" (believer) was also read as "*moomin.*" As a result, a greater number of the Prophet's followers were able to memorize large portions of the Qur'aan while the Prophet (ﷺ) was still alive. Since the majority of the Arabs could neither read nor write and most of the Qur'aan was preserved during the Prophet's lifetime by memorization, any factor which eased its memorization was of great importance. Hence, it could be said that the revelation of the Qur'aan in seven forms played a vital role in the actual preservation of the Qur'aan. It should also be noted that during the compilation of the Qur'aan after the Prophet's death, the only means of verifying the correctness of what had been written of the Qur'aan during the Prophet's lifetime was by comparing it with what had been memorized. Hence, the more people who were able to memorize it, the more accurately it could be compiled and verified. Consequently, the ease in memorization also played a key role in the accurate compilation of the Qur'aan.

In many places in the Qur'aan, Allaah challenged the Arabs of that time to produce a chapter similar to even its smallest chapter. The inability to imitate the Qur'aan's style was a miracle which proved that the Qur'aan had to be from Allaah. This miracle became even more obvious when none of the seven major tribes could imitate it even in their own dialects, as no one could claim that it was difficult to imitate due to it not being in their own dialect.

The Dialect of Quraysh

The Qur'aan continued to be read according to the seven forms until midway through Caliph 'Uthmaan's rule, when some confusion arose in other outlying provinces concerning the Qur'aan's recitation. Some Arabic tribes had begun to boast about the superiority of their readings and a rivalry began to develop. At the

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[28] *Fat-h al-Baaree*, vol. 8, p. 645.

same time, some new Muslims also began mixing the various forms out of ignorance. Caliph ‘Uthmaan decided to make official copies of the Qur’aan according to the dialect of Quraysh and send them along with Qur’aanic reciters to the major centers of Islaam. This decision was approved by all of the *sahaabah,* and all unofficial copies of the Qur’aan were destroyed. Following the distribution of the official copies, all the other dialects were dropped and the Qur’aan began to be read in only one dialect. Thus, the Qur’aan which is available throughout the world today is written and recited only according to the dialect of the Quraysh.[29] The discontinuance of the other six forms does not in any way represent a loss of any part of the Qur’aan. The *sahaabah* were given the option by the Prophet (ﷺ) to recite the Qur’aan in any of the seven dialects they wished because the meaning was the same and the variations were synonymous; and it is they who unanimously decided to discontinue the use of the other six. Such a decision could not have been unanimously approved if it in any way entailed the loss of even the smallest part of the Qur’aan. Thus, the Qur’aan according to the Qurayshee dialect is, without doubt, a perfect and complete compilation of Allaah’s revealed word to the last of His prophets and messengers, Muhammad (ﷺ).

QIRAA’AAT (THE RECITATIONS)

A *qiraa’ah* is, for the most part, a method of pronunciation used in the recitations of the Qur’aan. These methods are different from the seven forms or modes (*ahruf*) in which the Qur’aan was revealed. The seven modes were reduced to one, that of Quraysh, during the era of Caliph ‘Uthmaan when he ordered that the Qur’aan be copied in the Qurayshee dialect and distributed among the Islaamic centers of the time. Hence, only the Qurayshee mode remains today and all of the methods of recitation are based on this mode. The various methods have all been traced back to the Prophet (ﷺ) through a number of the *sahaabah* who were most noted for their Qur’aanic recitations. That is, these *sahaabah* recited the Qur’aan to the Prophet (ﷺ) or in his presence and received his approval.

[29] This is the opinion of a group of scholars. Others maintain that some aspects of the different dialects have been preserved in the varying *qiraa’aat*, but only those which are reconcilable with the *‘Uthmaanee Mus-haf.* They say the *sahaabah* wrote the *‘Uthmaanee Mus-haf* in such a way as to maximize the number of *ahruf* compatible with it. As-Suyootee, Ibn Hajar and Ibn al-Jazaree all supported the second opinion and attributed it to the majority of scholars. See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, p. 142, and *Ma‘ al-Masaahif*, p. 34.

Among them were the following: Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'Ali ibn Abee Taalib, Zayd ibn Thaabit, Ibn Mas'ood, Aboo ad-Dardaa', and Aboo Moosaa al-Ash'aaree. Many of the other *sahaabah* learned from these masters. Ibn 'Abbaas, the master commentator of the Qur'aan among the *sahaabah,* learned from both Ubayy and Zayd.[30]

Among the next generation of Muslims, referred to as the *taabi'oon,* there arose many scholars who learned the various methods of recitation from the *sahaabah* and taught them to others. Centers of Qur'aanic recitation developed in Madeenah, Makkah, Koofah, Basrah, and ash-Shaam (Greater Syria), leading to the evolution of Qur'aanic recitation into an independent science.[31] By the mid-eighth century CE, there existed a large number of outstanding scholars, all of whom were considered specialists in the field of recitation. Most of their methods of recitation were authenticated by chains of reliable narrators, ending with the Prophet (ﷺ). Those methods on each level of their chain were called *mutawaatir* and were considered to be the most accurate. Those methods in which the number of narrators were few or one on any level of the chain were referred to as *shaath.* However, some of the scholars of the following period began the practice of designating a set number of individual scholars from the previous period as being the most noteworthy and accurate reciters.

By the middle of the tenth century CE (6th century AH), it became a popular convention to limit the number of best reciters to seven, since this number coincided with the number of dialects in which the Qur'aan was revealed. Similarly, during this period the number of schools of Islaamic law *(math-habs)* were reduced to the famous four after a period in which there were many. The first to limit the number of authentic reciters to seven was the 'Iraaqi scholar, Aboo Bakr ibn Mujaahid (d. 936 CE), and those who wrote books on *qiraa'ah* after him followed suit.[32] This limitation is not an accurate representation of the classical scholars of Qur'aanic recitation. There were many others who were as good as the seven and a number who were greater than them. In fact, the classification of scholars was really a classification of how well their methods of recitation were preserved. Hence, the famous seven were those early scholars from different generations whose methods of recitation had the most chains of narrators with many narrations on each level of the chain. However, there were

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[30] *Al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, p. 204.
[31] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 204-5.
[32] *Al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, p. 224.

other classical scholars whose methods of recitation were just as authentically (*mutawaatir*) recorded as the famous seven. A list of the ten scholars of Qur'aanic recitation whose methods were best preserved is as follows:

1. Aboo 'Amr ibn al-'Alaa (d. 771 CE/154 AH) of Basrah
2. Ibn Katheer (d. 738 CE/119 AH) was among the students of the *sahaabah* of Makkah.
3. Naafi' (d. 786 CE/169 AH) was originally from Isfahaan, and his recitation, as transmitted by Warsh (d. 812 CE/196 AH), was of Madeenah.
4. Ibn 'Aamir (d. 737 CE/118 AH) was the chief judge (*qaadi*) of Damascus during the reign of al-Waleed ibn 'Abdul Maalik, who, along with the other Umayyad caliphs, made that city his capital.
5. 'Aasim (d. 746 CE/128 AH) of Koofah was the narrator of the dominant recitation in current use. His narration, as transmitted by Hafs, is the most common method of narration used in the Muslim world today with the exception of Africa.
6. Hamzah (d. 773 CE/156 AH) of Koofah.
7. Al-Kisaa'ee (d. 805 CE/189 AH) of Koofah was one of the foremost grammarians. He played a major role in the formulation of Arabic grammar rules.
8. Aboo Ja'far (d. 750 CE/132 AH) of Madeenah.
9. Ya'qoob (d. 820 CE/204 AH) of Basrah.
10. Khalaf (d. 844 CE/229 AH) of Baghdaad.

At the same time that scholars of *hadeeth* laid down conditions to determine the authenticity of statements or actions attributed to the Prophet (ﷺ), scholars of Qur'aanic recitation also formulated conditions to facilitate critical analysis of the existing recitations. For any given recitation to be accepted as authentic (*saheeh*), it had to fulfill three conditions. If any of the conditions were missing, such a recitation was classified as *shaath* (unusual). The first condition was that the recitation have an authentic chain of narration; that is, that the chain of narrators had to be unbroken, that the narrators were known to be righteous, and that they were known to possess good memories. It was also required that the recitation be

conveyed by a large number of narrators on each level of the chain of narration below the level of the *sahaabah* (the condition of *tawaatur*). Narrations which had authentic chains but lacked the condition of *tawaatur* were accepted as explanations (*tafseer*) of *sahaabah*, but were not considered as methods of reciting the Qur'aan. As for narrations which did not even have an authentic chain of narration, they were classified "*baatil*" (false) and rejected totally.

The second condition was that the recitations' variations match known Arabic grammatical constructions. Unusual cons-tructions were verified by their existence in passages of pre-Islamic prose or poetry. The third condition required the recitation to coincide with the script of one of the copies of Qur'aan distributed during the era of Caliph 'Uthmaan. Hence, differences which result from dot placement (e.g. *ta'lamoon* and *ya'lamoon*) are considered acceptable, provided the other conditions are met. If no support for an unusual condition could be found, the recitation of that construction would be classified *shaath*.[33] This classification did not mean that all aspects of the recitation were considered *shaath;* in fact, none of the accepted ten methods are totally free from some *shaath* constructions. *Shaath* narrations of this type also serve as explanations for the authentic narrations, as they are obviously statements of the *sahaabah.*

TAJWEED (PROPER QUR'AANIC RECITATION)

From the beginning of the final phase of prophethood, great stress was placed on the recitation of the Qur'aan. The very name "Qur'aan" means a "reading" or "recitation," and the first verse of the Qur'aan to be revealed was,



"Recite, In the name of your Lord Who created."[34]

The Prophet (ﷺ) himself urged his companions to recite as much of the Qur'aan as they could. Ibn Mas'ood reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) once said,

[33] *Al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, p. 214.
[34] *Soorah al-'Alaq* (96):1.

(مَنْ قَرَأَ حَرْفًا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ فَلَهُ بِهِ حَسَنَةٌ وَالْحَسَنَةُ بِعَشْرِ أَمْثَالِهَا .)

"*Whoever reads a single letter from Allaah's book will receive a blessing and each blessing is worth ten times its value.*"[35]

Aboo Umaamah reported that he said,

(اقْرَءُوا الْقُرْآنَ فَإِنَّهُ يَأْتِي يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ شَفِيعًا لِأَصْحَابِهِ .)

"*Recite the Qur'aan, for verily on the Day of Resurrection it will act as an intercessor for its companions (those who read it often).*"[36]

In fact, the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) encouraged us to read all of it once per month. 'Abdullaah ibn 'Amr reported that when Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) told him to read the whole Qur'aan in a month, he said, "Verily I have strength to do more." The Prophet (ﷺ) then told him to do it in ten days, but he still insisted that he could do better, so the Prophet (ﷺ) told him to read it in no less than seven days.[37] The Prophet (ﷺ) also warned us to beware of forgetting what we have memorized of the Qur'aan. He said,

(تَعَاهَدُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ فَوَالَّذِي نَفْسُ مُحَمَّدٍ بِيَدِهِ لَهُوَ أَشَدُّ تَفَلُّتًا مِنَ الْإِبِلِ فِي عُقُلِهَا .)

"*Be regular in your reading of the Qur'aan. For by the One in whose hand lies the soul of Muhammad, it will run away more quickly than a camel from its restraining cord.*"[38]

Consequently, from the early days of Islaam in its final form, great care has been paid to the recitation of the Qur'aan. Care was taken to see that the Qur'aan was recited as closely to the way it was revealed as possible. Scholars who specialized in the recitation of the Qur'aan formulated rules of recitation based on the

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[35] Collected by at-Tirmithee and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmithee*, vol. 3, p. 9, no. 2327. See footnote 94.
[36] Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 385, no. 1757).
[37] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp.516-7, no. 572) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 563, no. 2588).
[38] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 505-6, no. 552) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 379, no. 1725).

authentic recitations which they had learned. These rules, in fact, formed the basic science of Arabic phonetics, outlining the correct method of pronunciation for the letters of the Arabic alphabet, individual words, and sentences. The science which evolved out of this concern over the correct recitation of the Qur'aan came to be known as the science of *tajweed. Tajweed* was defined as the articulation of each Arabic sound correctly and distinctly and the pronunciation of each consonant, vowel, word, and sentence according to the standard of Arabic spoken by the Prophet's generation. The scholars also insisted that this should take place without excessive embellishment and unnatural mannerisms. However, one should recite the Qur'aan in the best natural voice possible, based upon the Prophet's recommendation,

(زَيِّنُوا الْقُرْآنَ بِأَصْوَاتِكُمْ .)

"Beautify the Qur'aan with your voices."[39]

It should be noted, however, that in spite of the great emphasis laid on the art of recitation, it is not a goal to be sought in itself. Recitation is only a means, a vehicle by which one may absorb the message so as to implement whatever the message entails. Recitation is, generally speaking, superior to mere reading with the eyes because it also involves the organ of speech and sense of hearing, all of which serve to reinforce the message when recitation is done consciously and not ritual-istically.

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[39] Collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 1, p. 384, no. 1463), Ibn Maajah, Ahmad, ad-Daarimee and Ibn Hibbaan, and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 1, p. 275, no. 1303.

10

ASBAAB AN-NUZOOL: REASONS FOR REVELATION

The Qur'aan is a book of universal guidance for all peoples in all times until the Day of Judgment, showing them the correct path in their relations with their Creator and in their relations with themselves as individuals and groups. At the same time, the Qur'aan was revealed to one man living in a specific time and place among a specific community. On occasions, certain events would occur about which the Prophet's followers were unsure, or on other occasions they might actually ask him about some matters which were unclear to them. In response to these and similar needs, verses were revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ). These events represent the context in which revelation came and are referred to as "*asbaab an-nuzool*" (reasons for revelation). The Qur'aan, therefore, uses the particular to give instructions of universal significance.

For example, when Khawlah bint Tha'labah's husband, Aws ibn as-Saamit, turned his back on her in the marriage bed (*thihaar*),[40] she went to complain to the Prophet (ﷺ). 'Aa'ishah, wife of the Prophet (ﷺ), said, "Blessed is He who hears all things. Verily, I heard some of what Khawlah bint Tha'labah said while she was complaining about her husband to the Prophet (ﷺ). She said, 'O Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ), he ate up my youth and I spread my stomach for him. Now that I have grown old and stopped having children, he has turned his back on me. O Allaah, verily I complain to You!' An evening did not pass before Jibreel came down with these verses:

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[40] By saying to her, as was the custom of the Arabs, "You are to me like my mother's back."

﴿ قَدۡ سَمِعَ ٱللَّهُ قَوۡلَ ٱلَّتِى تُجَـٰدِلُكَ فِى زَوۡجِهَا ﴾

'Allaah has heard the statement of the one who disputes with you about her husband' "[41]

Hence, the reasons for revelation (*asbaab an-nuzool*) could be defined as incidents recorded during the prophethood of Muhammad (ﷺ) about which Qur'aanic verses or chapters were revealed at the time of their occurrence.[42]

How To Know the Reason for the Revelation of a Verse

The circumstances for a particular revelation could only be known to the witnesses of the relevant events or someone who was informed by a witness. Therefore, the only reliable source for this knowledge is the *sahaabah.* Like the *hadeeths* of the Prophet (ﷺ), the reliability of such reports depends upon the reliability of the chain of narrators. The statement of a *tabi'ee* about the reason for a given revelation is usually considered weak by the scholars of *hadeeth* if he didn't attribute his opinion to one of the *sahaabah.*[43]

The Benefits of *Asbaab an-Nuzool*

Knowledge of the reasons for revelation is of great importance to understanding the Qur'aan, as well as many of the Islaamic laws contained in it. The following are some of the benefits provided by knowledge of the reasons for revelation:

1. *Asbaab an-nuzool* often explain the wisdom underlying the legislation of some of the Islaamic laws. Knowledge of the wisdom behind divine laws provides scholars with general principles which enable them to work out laws for new problems which have similar causes or effects. *Asbaab an-nuzool* also show the concern of the laws for the general welfare of man in their treatment of problems. This, in turn, makes us aware of Allaah's mercy, which is a fundamental part of

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[41] Collected by Ibn Maajah, vol. 3, p. 243, no. 2063, and Ibn Abee Haatim. Authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan Ibn Maajah*, vol. 1, pp. 351-2, no. 1678. The Qur'aanic verse is from *Soorah al-Mujaadilah* (58):1.

[42] See *Manaahil al-'Irfaan*, vol. 1, p. 99.

[43] See *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p.39.

all divine laws. For example, Ibn 'Abbaas reported that Hilaal ibn Umayyah went to the Prophet (ﷺ) and accused his wife (Hilaal's wife) of adultery with Shurayk ibn Sahmaa'. The Prophet (ﷺ) said to him, "*(Produce) the proof (four witnesses) or else you will receive the punishment (of eighty lashes) on your back.*" Hilaal replied, "*O Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ), if one of us sees a man on his woman, should he leave and seek witnesses?*" Allaah's Messenger again said, "*(Produce) the proof or else you will receive the punishment.*" Hilaal then said, "*(I swear) By the One who sent you with the Truth that I am telling the truth. And Allaah will surely reveal something to free my back from the punishment.*" And Jibreel descended with the revelation,

﴿ وَٱلَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ أَزْوَٰجَهُمْ وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُمْ شُهَدَآءُ إِلَّآ أَنفُسُهُمْ فَشَهَٰدَةُ أَحَدِهِمْ أَرْبَعُ شَهَٰدَٰتٍۭ بِٱللَّهِ ۙ إِنَّهُۥ لَمِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ۝٦ وَٱلْخَٰمِسَةُ أَنَّ لَعْنَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ إِن كَانَ مِنَ ٱلْكَٰذِبِينَ ۝٧ وَيَدْرَؤُا۟ عَنْهَا ٱلْعَذَابَ أَن تَشْهَدَ أَرْبَعَ شَهَٰدَٰتٍۭ بِٱللَّهِ ۙ إِنَّهُۥ لَمِنَ ٱلْكَٰذِبِينَ ۝٨ وَٱلْخَٰمِسَةَ أَنَّ غَضَبَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْهَآ إِن كَانَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰدِقِينَ ۝٩ ﴾

"And for those who accuse their wives without witnesses except themselves, the testimony of one of them (can be accepted) by bearing witness (with an oath) by Allaah four times that he is telling the truth, and the fifth time that the curse of Allaah be upon him if he is telling a lie. However, it would avert punishment from (the wife) if she bears witness four times (with an oath) by Allaah that he is lying, and the fifth (time) that Allaah's wrath be upon her if he was truthful."[44]

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[44] Soorah an-Noor (24):6-9. The *hadeeth* was collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 245-6, no. 271), at-Tirmithee, and Ibn Maajah.

2. Sometimes the reasons for revelation specify the particular aspect which was intended from the general meaning of the verses. That is, the obvious meaning of the verse may be general enough to include circumstances not intended by Allaah. An example of this is the verse,

﴿ لَا تَحۡسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَفۡرَحُونَ بِمَآ أَتَواْ وَّيُحِبُّونَ أَن يُحۡمَدُواْ بِمَا لَمۡ
يَفۡعَلُواْ فَلَا تَحۡسَبَنَّهُم بِمَفَازَةٖ مِّنَ ٱلۡعَذَابِۖ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٞ ١٨٨ ﴾

"You should not think that those who are happy with what they have brought about and enjoy being praised for things they have not done, will successfully escape the punishment. They will have a painful punishment."[45]

Marwaan[46] told his gateman, "O Raafi‘, go to Ibn ‘Abbaas and say to him, ‘If every man among us who is happy about what he has brought about and likes to be praised for what he has not done will be punished, then we will all be punished.’ " (When he did so) Ibn ‘Abbaas replied, "What has happened to you all concerning that verse? Verily it was revealed concerning the People of the Book."[47] He then recited (the verse previous to it),

﴿ وَإِذۡ أَخَذَ ٱللَّهُ مِيثَٰقَ ٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ لَتُبَيِّنُنَّهُۥ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا
تَكۡتُمُونَهُۥ فَنَبَذُوهُ وَرَآءَ ظُهُورِهِمۡ وَٱشۡتَرَوۡاْ بِهِۦ ثَمَنٗا قَلِيلٗاۖ فَبِئۡسَ مَا
يَشۡتَرُونَ ١٨٧ ﴾

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[45] *Soorah Aal ‘Imraan* (3):188.

[46] Marwaan ibn al-Hakam was a governor of Madeenah under Mu‘aawiyah. He later became the Caliph, and his descendants ruled until the Umayyads were finally overthrown.

[47] Christians and Jews.

“And when Allaah took the solemn pledge of those who were given a Book (of revelation), (saying to them), ‘Make it known to mankind, and do not conceal it!’ But they cast this (pledge) behind their backs and bartered it away for a trifling gain; and how evil was their bargain.”[48]

Ibn ‘Abbaas then said, “When Allaah’s Messenger (ﷺ) asked them about something, they concealed it from him and gave something else in its place. They then went out, making him think that they had informed him about what he had asked and they sought his praise and thanks. They were also very happy about having been able to hide from him what he asked about.”[49] Hence, the verse does not refer to everyone who is happy about what they have done, but specifically those who are happy about being given books of revelation, yet they hide its meanings from those who wish to know the truth.

3. The reason for revelation sometimes clarifies the laws which may be deduced from the verses. The obvious meaning of the verse may imply a particular law, whereas the circumstances under which the verse was revealed indicate another law. For example, ‘Urwah once said to his aunt ‘Aa’ishah, wife of the Prophet (ﷺ), “Do you know the verse,

﴿ إِنَّ ٱلصَّفَا وَٱلْمَرْوَةَ مِن شَعَآئِرِ ٱللَّهِ ۖ فَمَنْ حَجَّ ٱلْبَيْتَ أَوِ ٱعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَن يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا ﴾

‘Verily as-Safaa and al-Marwah are among the shrines of Allaah, so there is no sin on anyone who walks between them when making hajj or ‘*umrah’?*

I do not feel that there is any sin on one who does not walk between them.” ‘Aa’ishah replied, “What a terrible thing you have said, O my nephew! Verily, if the (verse) meant as you interpreted it, it would have been, ‘So there is so sin on anyone who does not walk between them.’ But verily, it was revealed because the

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[48] *Soorah Aal ‘Imraan* (3):187.

[49] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 73-4, no. 91) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1458, no. 6687).

Ans̲aar,[50] before Islaam, used to dedicate their (h̲ajj or *'umrah*) to two idols, Isaaf and Naa'ilah, on the seashore. The people went there, then walked between as̲-S̲afaa and al-Marwah, then got their heads shaved. After Islaam they didn't like to walk between them, because of what they used to do during the Days of Ignorance. Hence, Allaah revealed the verse, **'Verily as̲-S̲afaa and al-Marwah are among the shrines of Allaah...'** "[51] In another version she added, "Then Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) showed how the walk between them should be done. Thus, no one is allowed to drop the walking between them."[52] Although the obvious meaning of the verse indicated that the walking between Mount as̲-S̲afaa and Mount al-Marwah was merely *mubaah̲* (allowable), the reason for revelation indicates that it is *waajib* (compulsory).

Method of Interpretation

The verses may be general or specific and the reason for revelation may either confirm the general implications of the verses or their specific implication, or it may qualify them.

1. In the first case where the reason for revelation confirms the general implication of the verse, the verse should be interpreted according to its general meaning. For example, Anas ibn Maalik reported that the Jews used to remove their women from their houses when they menstruated. They would not eat, drink, or sit with them in their houses. When the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) was asked about it, Allaah revealed the verse,

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[50] Literally, "The Helpers." Islaamically, it refers to the Muslims of Madeenah, who gave the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions refuge when they fled Makkah.

[51] *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 644, no. 2923. The Qur'aanic verse is from *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):158.

[52] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 2, pp. 412-3, no. 706) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 645, no. 2926).

﴿ وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلْمَحِيضِ ۖ قُلْ هُوَ أَذًى فَٱعْتَزِلُوا۟ ٱلنِّسَآءَ فِى ٱلْمَحِيضِ ۖ وَلَا تَقْرَبُوهُنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَطْهُرْنَ ۖ فَإِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ فَأْتُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ ٱللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ ٱلتَّوَّٰبِينَ وَيُحِبُّ ٱلْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ ﴿٢٢٢﴾ ﴾

"They ask you about menstruation. Say: 'It is a harm, so keep away (sexually) from women during menses. And do not approach them (sexually) until they have become purified. But if they have cleaned themselves, you may approach them (sexually) in the way that Allaah has ordered you. Verily, Allaah loves those who repent often and cleanse themselves.' "[53]

Then the Prophet of Allaah (ﷺ) said,

(جَامِعُوهُنَّ فِي الْبُيُوتِ وَاصْنَعُوا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ غَيْرَ النِّكَاحِ .)

"*Sit with them in your houses, and you may do everything with them except intercourse.*"[54]

The general meaning of the verse that menstruating women should not be approached sexually is confirmed by events surrounding its revelation.

2. In the second case, where specific implications of the verse are confirmed by the reason for the revelation, the verse should be interpreted according to its specific meaning. For example, 'Urwah reported that Aboo Bakr as-Siddeeq set free six or seven slaves, all of whom were being tortured because of their belief in Allaah: Bilaal, 'Aamir ibn Fuhayrah, an-Nahdeeyah and her daughter, Umm 'Eesaa, and a slave girl of the Naw'il clan; and the following verses were revealed about him:

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[53] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):222.

[54] Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 175-6, no. 592), Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 1, p. 64, no. 258), at-Tirmithee, and Ibn Maajah.

﴿ وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا ٱلۡأَتۡقَى ﴿١٧﴾ ٱلَّذِي يُؤۡتِي مَالَهُۥ يَتَزَكَّىٰ ﴿١٨﴾ وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِندَهُۥ مِن نِّعۡمَةٍ تُجۡزَىٰٓ ﴿١٩﴾ إِلَّا ٱبۡتِغَآءَ وَجۡهِ رَبِّهِ ٱلۡأَعۡلَىٰ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَلَسَوۡفَ يَرۡضَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾ ﴾

> **"But (the Hell Fire) will be avoided by the most God-fearing, he who gives his wealth for self-purification and does not seek a favor as a reward from anyone, but only seeks the face of his Lord Most High, and he will soon be pleased."**[55]

The wording of the verse mentions "the most God-fearing," which is a superlative. This is a wording that indicates someone specific, rather than a generality. Thus, these verses should be understood to refer to Aboo Bakr as-Siddeeq, although a general lesson can be learned from his great example of selflessness.

3. However, in the third instance where the reason for revelation is specific and verse is revealed with general implications, the verse should be interpreted in a general way so as to include all circumstances similar to the specific events surrounding the verse's revelation. For example, al-Musayyib reported that when Aboo Taalib was on his deathbed, the Prophet of Allaah (ﷺ) came to visit him while Aboo Jahl and 'Abdullaah ibn Abee Umayyah were with him. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "O Uncle, say, 'There is no god but Allaah,' and I will defend you with it before Allaah." Then Aboo Jahl and 'Abdullaah said, "O Aboo Taalib, will you turn away from the creed of 'Abdul-Muttalib?" They kept on telling him that until he said that he was following the creed of 'Abdul-Muttalib. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "I will seek forgiveness for you as long as I am not forbidden to do so." Then the following verse was revealed:

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[55] *Soorah al-Layl* (92):17-21. 'Urwah's statement was collected by Ibn Abee Haatim. At-Tabaree quotes two supporting narrations, both of them *mursal*. *Tafseer at-Tabaree*, vol. 12, p. 260.

﴿ مَا كَانَ لِلنَّبِيِّ وَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَن يَسۡتَغۡفِرُواْ لِلۡمُشۡرِكِينَ وَلَوۡ كَانُوٓاْ أُوْلِي قُرۡبَىٰ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمۡ أَنَّهُمۡ أَصۡحَٰبُ ٱلۡجَحِيمِ ١١٣ ﴾

"It is not fitting for the Prophet (ﷺ) and those who believe to seek forgiveness for the pagans, even if they were close relatives, after it has become clear to them that (their relatives) are dwellers of the Fire."[56]

Hence, the verse prohibiting prayers seeking forgiveness applies to all Muslims in cases where their parents or relatives have died in a state of disbelief, even though it was revealed in reference to Aboo Taalib before his death.

The guiding principle to be followed when interpreting or applying the verses of the Qur'aan is that the lesson lies in the general meaning of the words and not simply in the special circumstances in which they were revealed. However, knowledge of the events surrounding the revelations puts the general meaning of the verses in proper context and prevents deviation. For example, Yoosuf ibn Maahak reported that when Marwaan was governor of al-Hijaaz, Caliph Mu'aawiyah desired that his son Yazeed be caliph after him, so he wrote to Marwaan. Marwaan then gathered the people of Madeenah and addressed them, inviting them to take an oath of allegiance to Yazeed ibn Mu'aawiyah as caliph after his father. When he added that it was the *sunnah* (way) of Aboo Bakr and 'Umar, 'Abdur-Rahmaan ibn Abee Bakr answered that it was the *sunnah* of Heraclius and Caesar. Marwaan then ordered that he be seized, so 'Abdur-Rahmaan entered 'Aa'ishah's house and the soldiers were unable to arrest him. Marwaan then said, "Surely, he is the one about whom this verse was revealed,

﴿ وَٱلَّذِي قَالَ لِوَٰلِدَيۡهِ أُفّٖ لَّكُمَآ أَتَعِدَانِنِيٓ ... ﴾

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[56] *Soorah at-Tawbah* (9):113. The incident was collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 158, no. 197) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 18, no. 36).

'And the one who said to his parents: *"Uff"*[57] to both of you.' "[58]

When the news of what he said reached 'Aa'ishah, she said, "Marwaan has lied. By Allaah, it was not about him, and if I wished to name the one about whom it was revealed, I could do so."[59]

Books Devoted to *Asbaab an-Nuzool*

The most famous book devoted to this subject is *Asbaab Nuzool al-Qur'aan*, by 'Alee ibn Ahmad al-Waahidee (d. 1076 CE/468 AH). The book has been reprinted many times since its first printing about one hundred years ago. A new edition, printed in 1991, prepared after a comparison of manuscripts in a number of libraries, removed some errors present in the earlier printings. Still, al-Waahidee's book is a mixture of authentic and weak reports. Other famous scholars who compiled books on this subject include Ibn Taymeeyah *(at-Tibyaan fee Nuzool al-Qur'aan)* and Jalaal ad-Deen as-Suyootee *(Lubaab an-Nuqool fee Asbaab an-Nuzool).* A contemporary *hadeeth* scholar from Yemen, Muqbil ibn Haadee al-Waadi'ee, has compiled a comprehensive book of the authentic reasons for revelation entitled *as-Saheeh al-Musnad min Asbaab an-Nuzool.*[60]

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[57] An expression of anger or displeasure.

[58] *Soorah al-Ahqaaf* (46):17. The rest of the verse reads, **" 'Do you threaten me that I will be brought forth (again) when generations before me have passed away?' And the two of them cry out to Allaah for help (and say), 'Woe to you! Believe! Verily the promise of Allaah is true.' But he says, 'This is nothing but the fables of the earlier (generations).' "**

[59] A combination of narrations collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 338-9, no. 352) and an-Nasaa'ee.

[60] See *al-Qur'aan al-Kareem* (Arabic CD) under *ma'loomaat—maktabah al-Qur'aan.*

11

MAKKAN AND MADEENAN REVELATIONS

The Qur'aan was revealed in sections to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) from the beginning of his prophethood until shortly before his death. Thus, the Qur'aan came down continuously over a period of twenty-three years.

The various sections of the Qur'aan were generally revealed to solve the problems which existed among the Muslim communities in both Makkah and Madeenah. Since the prob-lems and needs of Makkah were different from those of Madeenah, the revelations of Makkah and Madeenah have special characteristics of their own.

It is very important that the differences between the revelations of Makkah and Madeenah be clearly understood if the Qur'aan itself is to be clearly understood. Because of the great importance of the Qur'aan to Islaam, Islaamic scholars from the time of the *sahaabah* have devoted much time and effort in this area of study.

THE FEATURES OF MAKKAN REVELATIONS

Makkan revelations are defined as all verses and chapters of the Qur'aan which were brought by Jibreel to the Prophet (ﷺ) before the *Hijrah* (622 CE). This includes verses which were revealed in Taa'if, as well as those revealed in other areas outside of Makkah.[1] These revelations represent the first stage of the Islaamic movement, in which its fundamentals were established.

[1] *Al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, p. 23.

1. *Tawheed* (The Oneness of Allaah):

When Islaam was first presented to the people of Makkah, they were in a state of disbelief. Most of them believed in Allaah, but they had put many intermediaries between themselves and Allaah. They made idols to represent these intermediaries and worshipped them instead of Allaah. Thus, the early revelations taught the people about Allaah's unity and power over all things. They told the people that Allaah was without parents, offspring or any partner who shared His powers. They also pointed out that idols could neither bring good nor hold back evil. They questioned the logic of worshipping things which could not even see or hear.

2. *Salaah* (Formal Prayer):

After the first verses of revelation came informing the Prophet (ﷺ) that he had been chosen for prophethood, Allaah sent Jibreel to teach him the correct method of prayer. This was necessary because the correct method of prayer could not be arrived at by logical reasoning. Therefore, even the Prophet (ﷺ) himself had to be taught the correct method of worshipping Allaah. Due to the great importance of *salaah* in nurturing a person's consciousness of his Lord, the early verses called upon the Prophet (ﷺ) and his early band of followers to make their *salaah* regularly.[2]

Since the Makkans were in the habit of worshipping idols in the belief that these home made gods would carry their prayers to Allaah for them, the early verses were also aimed at clarifying this misconception. The verses taught that both *salaah* and *du'aa* (supplication) should only be made for and to Allaah, as He is the only one who can answer them.

Great stress was placed on *salaah* because of its relationship to *tawheed.* Pure *salaah* to Allaah represents *tawheed* in practice.

3. The Unseen:

Since there was no way that human beings could possibly come to know about the unseen world, the early verses taught them about its wonders, its mysteries, and its horrors. The verses described paradise and its pleasures in order to encourage the believers to continue to do good deeds. They also

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[2] Cf. 23:1-11; 70:34-5; 73:2; 73:20; 74:38-43.

described the Hellfire and its torments in order to encourage the believers to strive to avoid evil deeds. Descriptions of the Fire and its inhabitants also reassured the believers that those who do wrong in this life will not escape Allaah's punishment. Such descriptions were also aimed at scaring the disbelievers into reconsidering their position before it became too late. Some of the verses also reasoned with those who could not accept the resurrection by giving them examples from nature, such as rain falling on dead earth bringing it back to life. Others pointed out logically that the recreation of life would be easier than its creation, although it is all the same to Allaah.

4. Allaah's Existence:

There were some individuals among the Makkans who were in doubt about Allaah's very existence. Thus, some of the early verses presented logical arguments proving Allaah's existence. Sometimes proofs were taken from nature and the creatures common to that society. Allaah asked the Makkans,

﴿ أَفَلَا يَنظُرُونَ إِلَى ٱلْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ ﴿١٧﴾ وَإِلَى ٱلسَّمَآءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ ﴿١٨﴾ وَإِلَى ٱلْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ ﴿١٩﴾ وَإِلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ ﴿٢٠﴾ ﴾

> **"Why don't they look at the camels and how they were created, and the sky and how it was raised, and the mountains and how they are firmly fixed and the earth and how it was spread out?"**[3]

At other times straight logic was used. Allaah asked them if they were created from nothing or if they created themselves:

[3] *Soorah al-Ghaashiyah* (88):17-20.

﴿ أَمْ خُلِقُوا۟ مِنْ غَيْرِ شَىْءٍ أَمْ هُمُ ٱلْخَٰلِقُونَ ٣٥ ﴾

“Were they created from nothing, or were they themselves the creators?”[4]

This verse is amazing in the conciseness of its challenge. There are only three possible answers to the question of the source of creation. The verse mentions only two and leaves the third unstated due to its obviousness. It doesn’t bother to disprove these two possibilities because they are so obviously false. Something which doesn’t exist doesn’t have the power to bring anything into existence. Likewise, everyone knows there was a time when he or she didn’t exist, so we can’t have created ourselves. Even if some were to argue that they came from their parents and that their parents came from their parents and so on, the chain of causes must eventually decrease to one whose existence doesn’t depend on anything. Thus, Allaah, the Creator, has to be accepted for our existence to make sense. In fact, one of the people of Makkah, Jubayr ibn Mut‘im reported that he heard the Prophet (ﷺ) reciting this passage in his *salaah*, and it made him feel that his heart was going to fly, which caused him to eventually accept Islaam.[5]

5. Challenges:

In order to prove to the Quraysh that the Qur’aan was from Allaah and that Muhammad (ﷺ) was a prophet of Allaah, some of the Makkan verses challenged the Arabs to imitate the Qur’aan. Many of the chapters began with individual letters like “*Alif, Laam* and *Meem,*” “*Saad,*” or “*Noon*” in order to tease the Makkans with the same letters of the alphabet with which they made their flowery speeches and poetry. Allaah revealed the Qur’aan with the same letters, but they just could not imitate it. Since the Arabs were unable to produce a chapter like even the smallest chapter of Qur’aan, the miraculous nature of the Qur’aan and its divine origin were clearly proven to the people at that time. However, many of them preferred to look at the Qur’aan as a magical spell, and the Prophet (ﷺ) as a master magician.

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[4] *Soorah at-Toor* (52):35.

[5] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 357-8, no. 377. See also Ibn Hajar’s comments in *Fat-h al-Baaree*, vol. 8, p. 469.

6. The People of Old:

The Makkan verses often mentioned historical examples of earlier civilizations, like the *'Aad* and the *Thamood.* They were mentioned in order to warn those who had rejected the message of Islaam. The verses spoke about the wonders of the ancient civilizations. They recounted the many blessing which Allaah had bestowed on the peoples of those civilizations. Then they told how the people disobeyed Allaah and denied His blessings, and how Allaah's punishment caught them while they were totally unconcerned of what could become of them if they displeased Allaah. These examples were quite familiar to the Arabs because the ruins of such civilizations could still be seen. For example, the stone tombs of Madaa'in Saalih, associated with the Thamood, the people of Prophet Saalih, were directly on the trade route to Syria.

7. *Eemaan:*

Very few laws were revealed in the Makkan verses. Instead, the verses concentrated on principles which would build the *eemaan* (faith) of the early Muslims. These verses spoke of the importance of fearing Allaah and being aware of His presence and knowledge of all things. They were often filled with advice about being patient, perseverant, truthful and trustworthy, in order to build the moral and spiritual character of the early Muslims, who were in a minority and under great pressure from Makkan society.

8. Short Verses:

The Makkan *soorahs* usually had short verses, catchy rhymes, and a very strong rhythm. These qualities were meant to catch the attention of listeners who were basically opposed to the message of Islaam. The verses had to be short because the audience would not be willing to listen to long, drawn-out statements. As soon as they heard any of the Qur'aan, they would stick their fingers in their ears and turn away. Thus, the verses often had to strike home immediately. They often resembled the chants of the oracles and fortunetellers, but their meanings were very clear, whereas the oracles' chants were mostly obscure and vague. For example, the oracle Zabraa warned her people about a disaster that would soon strike them in the following words:

By the fluttering wind,

And the falling night;

By the shining morn,

And the piercing star;

By the rain-laden clouds,

Verily, the trees of the valley are really deceptive,

And teeth gnash until twisted.

Verily, the boulders of the mountain warn of mourning,

That you won't find any escape from.

The fortuneteller Zabraa.

THE FEATURES OF MADEENAN REVELATIONS

Madeenan revelations are all those verses and chapter of the Qur'aan which were revealed after the *Hijrah* (the emigration to Madeenah). This includes verses which were revealed during the battles, as well as those revealed in Makkah and Minaa during and after the Farewell Pilgrimage. All of these verses are considered Madeenan because they represent the revelations of the second stage of the Islaamic movement, in which the consolidation of the Islaamic state took place.[6]

The following are some of the main characteristics of Madeenan verses:

1. Laws:

Once Madeenah had become the new center of the Islaamic movement, the Islaamic state was born. The Prophet (ﷺ) became ruler over the Muslims of Madeenah, as well as the Jews and the Arab idol worshippers who lived there. A constitution was drawn up and a system of justice was established. Thus, the verses during the Madeenan stage contained the many social, economic and spiritual laws which were necessary for the organization and development of an

[6] *Al-Itqaan*, vol. 1, p. 23.

Islaamic state. It was during this period that the last three pillars of Islaam, *zakaah, sawm* and hajj, were revealed.[7] Likewise, it was during this period that drinking alcohol, eating swine and gambling were all forbidden.

2. People of the Book:

In Madeenah, Muslims came in contact with the Jews for the first time. In order to try to shake the beliefs of the Muslims, the Jews used to ask the Prophet (ﷺ) various questions about Allaah, the earlier prophets, and the unseen. Thus, a number of Madeenan verses represented answers to the many questions raised by the Jews. The Muslims of Madeenah also came in contact with the Christians on a larger scale. As a result of that, we find a number of Madeenan verses clarifying Christian misconceptions about Prophet Jesus and Allaah. They pointed out that Jesus' birth was not greater than that of Aadam, who had neither father nor mother. They also stressed that the miracles of Jesus, such as bringing the dead back to life, were only by Allaah's permission. Thus, Jesus was not a god nor the son of Allaah, and Allaah was not the third of three.

3. The *Munaafiqoon*:

For the first time since the beginning of the final message we find people entering Islaam yet not believing in it. In Makkah, Muslims were oppressed and attacked, so no one would enter Islaam unless he truly believed. On the other hand, the Muslims of Madeenah were strong and they ruled the city. Thus, we find some people entering Islaam in order to benefit from its strength and to oppose it from within. 'Abdullaah ibn Ubayy ibn Salool was about to be crowned king of Madeenah when the Prophet (ﷺ) arrived. The Prophet (ﷺ) was made the ruler of Madeenah, and ibn Salool's hopes were ruined.[8] Since the Muslims were strong and he could not openly oppose them, he accepted Islaam and worked against it from within. He eventually became the head of the *Munaafiqoon* (hypocrites). Thus, the verses of the Madeenan stage warned the Muslims about the dangers of the hypocrites and taught them how to deal effectively with them.

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[7] *Zakaah* had been prescribed in Makkah, but it was informal at that time; the detailed rules were not laid down until after the Hijrah.

[8] See *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 989, no. 4431.

4. Jihaad:

The right to fight against the enemy was given for the first time in Madeenah. During the Makkan period, Muslims were forbidden to fight back. This was for two basic reasons: (1) The Muslims were a minority and could easily have been completely wiped out. (2) This was a stage where the believers' characters were being forged. One of the foremost qualities required of those who would carry the message was steadfast patience. Only those of strong faith could survive this test. The Makkan period prepared the foundation of the Islaamic movement to come. It was during the Madeenan stage that a series of battles were fought against the forces of disbelief, until finally Makkah was conquered and the whole of the Arabian peninsula came under the rule of Islaam. Thus, a number of the Madeenan verses taught Muslims the Islaamic principles of war. For example, they taught how to deal with prisoners of war and they forbade retreat during an attack except as a trick to trap the enemy. They also encouraged the Muslims to prepare themselves with the best weapons and battle gear they could find.

5. Long Verses:

The Madeenan verses tended to be longer than those of Makkah. In fact, there are a number of Madeenan verses which are longer than whole *soorahs* of the Makkan period. The longest verse of the Qur'aan is the verse on loans in the Madeenan *Soorah al-Baqarah.*[9] The shortest *soorah* of the Qur'aan is the Makkan *Soorah al-Kawthar,*[10] which contains a total of only 11 separate words in its three short verses. The need to catch the attention of unwilling listeners was no longer there, because Islaam had become strong and its followers were many. Thus, the audience at this stage was quite willing to listen attentively to longer verses teaching the vital laws of Islam.

6. Order of the *Soorahs*:

Although all of the Makkan verses were revealed during the same period, they were neither memorized nor written in the same order in which they were revealed. Verses from various *soorahs* were revealed together, and sometimes whole *soorahs* were revealed at once. Whenever single verses were revealed, the Prophet (ﷺ) would tell his scribes to write it in the *soorah* to which it belonged. If

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[9] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):282.
[10] The 108th *soorah.*

a new *soorah* was revealed, he would recite the *soorah* in the order it was to be recorded. Once the Madeenan verses and *soorahs* began to be revealed, the Prophet (ﷺ) would tell his companions to place them before or after certain Makkan *soorahs* and verses. Thus, when the revelation of the Qur'aan was complete, Makkan verses could be found within Madeenan *soorahs* and Madeenan verses within Makkan *soorahs*. The Prophet (ﷺ) ordered the verses and *soorahs* of the Qur'aan according to Allaah's command. The reason for the mingling may have been that the verses were revealed according to the needs of a developing community, whereas the order for reading purposes was varied to make it clear that the Qur'aan is not a mere historical document. By divorcing the verses from the chronological order of their revelation, the general and universal aspects of their message are emphasized.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DISTINCTION

There are a number of reasons why a distinction needs to be made between Makkan and Madeenan *soorahs* and verses. The following are three of the most important reasons:

1. *Fiqh* (Islamic Law):

The various laws of Islaam were revealed over a period of twenty-three years. Some laws canceled earlier laws and other laws were revealed bit by bit. Thus, it is necessary to know at which point in time the various laws were revealed in order to apply them properly. The laws of the later Madeenan period sometimes took the place of earlier laws. For example, alcohol was made forbidden in gradual stages. The first law concerning alcohol was simply a warning of its dangers. Allaah said,

﴿ يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلْخَمْرِ وَٱلْمَيْسِرِ ۖ قُلْ فِيهِمَآ إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَٰفِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَآ أَكْبَرُ مِن نَّفْعِهِمَا ۗ وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنفِقُونَ قُلِ ٱلْعَفْوَ ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمُ ٱلْءَايَٰتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١٩﴾ ﴾

> **“And they ask you about *khamr* (alcohol) and *maysir* (gambling); tell them that they contain some benefit, but the sin is greater than the benefit.”**[11]

The second law that was revealed warned Muslims away from *salaah* when they were intoxicated (drunk). Allaah said,

﴿ لَا تَقْرَبُوا۟ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَأَنتُمْ سُكَٰرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَعْلَمُوا۟ مَا تَقُولُونَ ﴾

> **“Do not come to *salaah* when you are intoxicated, until you know what you are saying.”**[12]

The third law, however, was a complete prohibition of even coming near any form of alcohol. Allaah said,

﴿ إِنَّمَا ٱلْخَمْرُ وَٱلْمَيْسِرُ وَٱلْأَنصَابُ وَٱلْأَزْلَٰمُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ فَٱجْتَنِبُوهُ ﴾

> **“Verily, *khamr, maysir* and *azlaam* (fortunetelling) are filth, as a result of *Shaytaan’s* work, so stay away from them.”**[13]

If one was unaware of the order in which these verses were revealed, he may mistakenly think that he is allowed to drink alcohol as long as he doesn’t get drunk and come to *salaah*. Or, he may think that it is allowed for him to benefit from the sale of alcohol.

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[11] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):219.
[12] *Soorah an-Nisaa’* (4):43
[13] *Soorah al-Maa’idah* (5):90.

2. *Da'wah:*

By understanding the order in which the verses of the Qur'aan were revealed, one can learn the best method of teaching Islaam. For example, the Qur'aan taught the believers not to curse or make fun of the idols of the disbelievers in order not to drive them away and in order that they not curse Allaah out of ignorance. Instead they were told to reason with the disbelievers and show them logically why the worship of idols was incorrect. Allaah quoted Prophet Ibraaheem as saying to his people,

﴿ أَفَتَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنفَعُكُمْ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا يَضُرُّكُمْ ﴿٦٦﴾ ﴾

"Are you worshipping besides Allaah other gods which cannot benefit you at all nor harm you?"[14]

The verse quoting Ibraaheem's declaration of enmity to his people and what they worshipped instead of Allaah:

﴿ قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِىٓ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ وَٱلَّذِينَ مَعَهُۥٓ إِذْ قَالُوا۟ لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَءَٰٓؤُا۟ مِنكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ ٱللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ ٱلْعَدَٰوَةُ وَٱلْبَغْضَآءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّىٰ تُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَحْدَهُۥٓ ﴾

"There is an excellent example for you in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people, 'We are clear of you and of whatever you worship besides Allah; we have rejected you, and there has arisen, between us and you, enmity and hatred forever, unless ye believe in Allah alone,' "[15]

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[14] *Soorah al-Ambiyaa'* (21):66.
[15] *Soorah al-Mumtahinah* (60:4).

was revealed in Madeenah, after the Muslims had practiced years of patient argument with their relatives in Makkah. The disbelievers of Makkah had met reasoned argument with persecution and violence. They had driven the Muslims from their homes, and a state of armed conflict existed between the two sides. It is not, therefore, *Sunnah* for a person to accept Islaam, read this verse and try to apply it on his family and acquaintances.

3. ***Seerah:***

Most of the most important events in the Prophet's life have been recorded in various verses of the Qur'aan. Thus, by knowing the order in which the verses were revealed, it is possible to piece together a large portion of the biography of the Prophet (ﷺ).

12

NASKH: REPEAL AND REPLACEMENT OF DIVINE LAWS

Divine laws were revealed by Allaah to His messengers for the purpose of correcting man's beliefs about God (*'aqeedah*), his methods of worshipping God (*'ibaadah*), and his social life or social conduct (*mu'aamalah*). Since there is only one correct belief about God, *tawheed,* whereby Allaah is considered as One, without partner in His essence, His attributes, His actions, and right of worship, all of the prophets invited mankind to that belief in exactly the same way. Allaah confirmed this fact to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in the Qur'aan, stating,

﴿ وَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَا مِن قَبْلِكَ مِن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِيٓ إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُۥ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنَا۠ فَٱعْبُدُونِ ﴿٢٥﴾ ﴾

> **"And, verily, I have not sent any prophet before you without revealing to him that there is no God besides Me, so worship Me."**[16]

However, in the case of methods of worship and social conduct, the same format was not used in all cases. It is true that principles of worship and social conduct were all aimed at purification of the soul, protection of society, and tying communities together with bonds of cooperation and brotherhood, but the needs of each nation or people were different. The needs may even vary from time to

[16] *Soorah al-Ambiyaa'* (21):25.

time within the same nation. Thus, what may suit a people in one age may not suit them in another. Also, what can be suitably used by a prophet to call the people at the beginning of his prophethood may be inappropriate in the later stages, when Allaah's message has been established in the land and a state based on divine law has come into being. Thus, the wisdom behind the various laws takes all of these factors into account, for there is no doubt about Allaah's all-encompassing mercy and knowledge. It is His right to command and forbid us, as He has informed us:

﴿ لَا يُسۡـَٔلُ عَمَّا يَفۡعَلُ وَهُمۡ يُسۡـَٔلُونَ ٢٣ ﴾

"He (Allaah) cannot be questioned about what He does, but they (mankind) will be questioned."[17]

Therefore, it should not in any way seem strange that Allaah may replace a divine law with another based on His knowledge of all things, past, present and future. This replacement of a divine law by another divine law is referred to in Arabic-Islaamic terminology as "*naskh.*" Allaah referred to the existence of this process as follows:

﴿ وَإِذَا بَدَّلۡنَآ ءَايَةٗ مَّكَانَ ءَايَةٖ ۙ وَٱللَّهُ أَعۡلَمُ بِمَا يُنَزِّلُ قَالُوٓاْ إِنَّمَآ أَنتَ مُفۡتَرِۭۚ بَلۡ أَكۡثَرُهُمۡ لَا يَعۡلَمُونَ ١٠١ ﴾

"And if I place a verse in place of another verse— and Allaah knows best what He bestows from on high, step by step—they say, 'You are just inventing it!' "[18]

﴿ مَا نَنسَخۡ مِنۡ ءَايَةٍ أَوۡ نُنسِهَا نَأۡتِ بِخَيۡرٖ مِّنۡهَآ أَوۡ مِثۡلِهَآ ﴾

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[17] *Soorah al-Ambiyaa'* (21):23.
[18] *Soorah an-Na<u>h</u>l* (16):101.

> **“Whatever verse I have abrogated or caused to be forgotten, I will bring another better than it or equal to it.”**[19]

CONDITIONS FOR *NASKH*

For *naskh* to have taken place, the following three conditions must have been fulfilled:

1. The law which has been replaced has to have been a divine law. This means that the gradual prohibition of alcohol would not be classified as *naskh*, because each successive verse only expanded the prohibitive scope of the previous verse. The original behavior of the people was to act as if alcohol was lawful. It was their assumption that alcohol was permissible that was gradually abolished by the three verses on this subject, not any previous statement by Allaah that liquor was permissible.
2. The proof used to replace the old law has to be a divine command which was revealed after the revelation of the old law.
3. The law which is to be replaced cannot have a specific time limit attached to it from the time of its revelation. If it has a limited time period, it simply becomes void when the time period ends, and such a process is not considered as *naskh*. For instance, fasting is required daily until sunset during Rama<u>d</u>aan. The permission to eat at night during Rama<u>d</u>aan or, after it is over, by day or night, doesn’t involve *naskh*. [20]

It should be noted that *naskh* only occurs to divine commands and prohibitions. *Naskh* cannot occur to statements of fact, because such statements are either true or false, so to say that a previous report has been abrogated really means it was either a deliberate lie or an error, both of which may not be attributed to Allaah.[21] Therefore, descriptions of Allaah’s attributes, the stories of the previous prophets and their peoples, parables and descriptions of the hereafter

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[19] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):106.

[20] These conditions can be found in virtually any book of *usool al-fiqh*. See, for example, *Shar<u>h</u> al-Kawkab al-Muneer*, vol. 3, pp. 526-7.

[21] One should note, however, that sometimes orders occur in the Qur’aan in the format of a statement. Cf. 2:125, 2:228, 2:233, 3:97.

are all excluded from the category of *naskh*. Likewise, the divine promises and warnings are excluded, because Allaah doesn't break His promises. Nor could one call it *naskh* if Allaah promises the believers gardens in paradise in an early verse and in a later verse promises them the pleasure of seeing Him. The promise of gardens has not been replaced by the promise of seeing Allaah; rather, both will happen.[22] It should also be noted that the underlying principles of worship and moral behavior have not changed through the ages. *Salaah*, fasting, charity and pilgrim-age have been constant practices of Allaah's religion—no matter which prophet was delivering the message—and lying, murder, adultery, cheating, etc. have been condemned by all the prophets. Therefore, the area in which *naskh* operates is in details of the format of a religious practice or a social law, not in the core principles.

KNOWLEDGE OF *NASKH*

Knowledge of *naskh* is of great importance to the scholars of *fiqh* (Islaamic law) and *tafseer* (explanation of the Qur'aan), in order that application of Islaamic laws does not become confused. Someone who is ignorant of repealed laws may try to apply them and end up doing *haraam* acts and calling others to *haraam*. Thus, it was reported that once 'Alee ibn Abee Taalib, the fourth Caliph, passed by a judge and asked him if he knew in which laws *naskh* had occurred. The man replied, "No." 'Alee said to him, "You have perished and caused others to perish!"[23] However, it should be noted that the number of authentic cases of *naskh* are few and far between. There are only three reliable ways to identify these cases:

1. A clearly worded narration from the Prophet (ﷺ) or one of his companions (*sahaabee*). For example, the Prophet (ﷺ) was reported to have said,

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[22] See *Sharh al-Kawkab al-Muneer*, vol. 3, pp. 543.

[23] Quoted by as-Suyootee in *al-Itqaan*, vol. 3, p. 59.

"I used to forbid you from visiting graves, but (now) you should visit them, as surely they are reminders (of the next life)."[24]

One of the *sahaabah* by the name of Salamah ibn al-Akwa' reported that when the verse,

﴿ وَعَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُۥ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ ﴾

"And the redemption for those who have difficulty with (fasting) is the feeding of a poor person,"[25]

was revealed, whoever wanted to stop fasting would redeem himself, until the verse after it[26] was revealed and replaced it:

﴿ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنكُمُ ٱلشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ ﴾

"Whoever among you who witnesses the (beginning of) the month should fast (the month)."[27]

2. The unanimous agreement of early Muslim scholars on both the law which was replaced and the one which replaced it. That is, their recognition of the fact that an abrogation took place and not their agreement to abrogate a divine law. An example of this can be found in a *hadeeth* wherein the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

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[24] Reported by Buraydah and collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, pp. 463-4, no. 2131), Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 2, p. 919, no. 3229), an-Nasaa'ee and Ahmad.

[25] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):184.

[26] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):185.

[27] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 27, no. 34) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 555, nos. 2547-8). It should be borne in mind that the *sahaabah* used the word *naskh* for a broader category of changes to an existing law than the word came to mean among scholars of later generations. For the *sahaabah, naskh* included *takhsees* (specification) as well as complete abrogation. Therefore, the general permission for anyone who cared to feed a poor person instead of fasting was cancelled. However, the permission still stands for the aged and the chronically ill, as Ibn 'Abbaas noted in *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 26-7, no. 32.

(مَنْ شَرِبَ الْخَمْرَ فَاجْلِدُوهُ فَإِنْ عَادَ فَاجْلِدُوهُ فَإِنْ عَادَ فَاجْلِدُوهُ فَإِنْ عَادَ الرَّابِعَةَ فَاقْتُلُوهُ .)

"*Whip whoever takes intoxicants (each time he is caught) and on the fourth time kill him.*"[28]

The *sahaabah* were unanimous on the fact that the one who took intoxicants was no longer to be executed. They did not repeal the law by unanimous agreement (*ijmaa'*), but the law was not applied because it was known to all of them that the Prophet (ﷺ) repealed it.[29]

3. Reliable historical knowledge of a law being put into practice during an earlier historical period, then a later law appears to clearly contradict it. For example, Shaddaad ibn Aws reported that at the time of the conquest of Makkah (8AH/630 CE), the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

(أَفْطَرَ الْحَاجِمُ وَالْمَحْجُومُ .)

"*The cupper and the cupped*[30] *have both broken the fast.*"[31]

On the other hand, Ibn 'Abbaas reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) was cupped while fasting and while he was in *ihraam*.[32] Some versions of this report also mentioned that it took place during the Farewell Pilgrimage (10 AH/632 CE).[33]

Naskh cannot be determined by *ijtihaad* (reasoning in the absence of clear evidence), nor by the opinion of a Qur'aanic commentator, nor solely by the apparent contradiction of texts.

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[28] Collected by Ahmad and by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 3, pp. 1252-3, nos. 4467-70) and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 3, p. 848, nos. 3763-4.

[29] The consensus on this issue was reported by at-Tirmithee in his book *al-'Ilal.* See *Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 3, p. 1252, footnote no. 3903.

[30] Cupping is a practice of drawing blood to the surface of the skin by making an incision and creating a vacuum at the point. It is done for medicinal purposes.

[31] Collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 2, p. 650, no. 2363), at-Tirmithee, Ibn Maajah and Ahmad, and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 2, p. 451, no. 2075.

[32] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 3, p. 91, no. 159.

[33] See *Fat-h al-Baaree*, vol. 4, p. 210.

TYPES OF *NASKH*

There are basically four different types of *naskh* which can take place between the two sources of divine law, the Qur'aan and the *Sunnah.*

The first is the *naskh* of the Qur'aan by the Qur'aan. In this type of *naskh*, a Qur'aanic verse containing a law is superseded by another Qur'aanic verse containing a new law. An example can be found in the verses on immoral women. The early law was stated in the Qur'aan as follows:

﴿ وَٱلَّٰتِي يَأۡتِينَ ٱلۡفَٰحِشَةَ مِن نِّسَآئِكُمۡ فَٱسۡتَشۡهِدُواْ عَلَيۡهِنَّ أَرۡبَعَةً مِّنكُمۡۖ فَإِن شَهِدُواْ فَأَمۡسِكُوهُنَّ فِي ٱلۡبُيُوتِ حَتَّىٰ يَتَوَفَّىٰهُنَّ ٱلۡمَوۡتُ أَوۡ يَجۡعَلَ ٱللَّهُ لَهُنَّ سَبِيلٗا ﴿١٥﴾ ﴾

"And for those of your women who have illicit relations, seek four witnesses among you. If they bear witness, confine the women in houses until they die or until Allaah makes another way for them."[34]

This law was abolished and replaced by the following law of lashing:

﴿ ٱلزَّانِيَةُ وَٱلزَّانِي فَٱجۡلِدُواْ كُلَّ وَٰحِدٖ مِّنۡهُمَا مِاْئَةَ جَلۡدَةٖ ﴾

"Lash both the fornicator and the fornicatress one hundred times each."[35]

The second type is *naskh* of the Qur'aan by the *Sunnah.* There is controversy as to whether this category exists. Those who affirm it give as an example of it the verse on wills, wherein Allaah instructs the believers as follows:

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[34] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):15.
[35] *Soorah an-Noor* (24):2.

﴿ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ إِن تَرَكَ خَيْرًا ٱلْوَصِيَّةُ لِلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ﴾

"It is prescribed for each of you to have a bequest for your parents and relatives if any of you nears death and leaves wealth."[36]

This early law was replaced by the inheritance laws and repealed by the *hadeeth* in which the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

"Verily Allaah has given every one with a right his rightful (share in the inheritance) so there is no bequest for one who inherits."[37]

The third is the *naskh* of the *Sunnah* by the Qur'aan; that is, the abolition and replacement of an Islaamic law which the Prophet (ﷺ) taught by the law in a verse revealed in the Qur'aan. An example of this type of *naskh* is when prayer in the direction of Jerusalem was abolished. Muslims prayed towards Jerusalem, following the example of the Prophet (ﷺ) until they emigrated to Madeenah. After their settling in Madeenah, Allaah revealed the verse,

﴿ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ ۚ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنتُمْ فَوَلُّوا۟ وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُۥ ﴾

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[36] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):180.

[37] Collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 2, p. 808, no. 2864) an-Nasaa'ee, at-Tirmithee, Ibn Maajah and Ahmad, and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 2, p. 554, no. 2493. It should be noted that the majority of scholars consider this *hadeeth* to clarify the verses about inheritance in *Soorah an-Nisaa'*. Therefore, in their view, the *naskh* was accomplished by the Qur'aanic verses, not the *hadeeth.* Their reasoning is that the Qur'aan's authenticity is established by *mutawaatir* transmission, whereas the *hadeeth's* authenticity was established by a few chains of transmission, which makes it strong enough to explain the verses of *Soorah an-Nisaa'*, but not strong enough to abrogate a Qur'aanic verse by itself. See *Sharh al-Kawkab al-Muneer*, vol. 3, p. 529.

> **“So turn your face toward *al-Masjid al-Haraam* (Makkah) and wherever you all may be, turn your faces toward it.”**[38]

The Prophet’s wife ‘Aa’ishah also reported that the fasting of ‘*Aashooraa’* (the 10th of the month of *Muharram*) used to be compulsory until the verses of Ramadaan were revealed. After that, whoever wished to fast ‘*Aashooraa’* did so.[39] When the Prophet (ﷺ) migrated to Madeenah, he found the Jews fasting on that day in commemoration of Prophet Moosaa’s deliverance from Pharaoh in Egypt. The Prophet (ﷺ), under divine guidance, ordered the Muslims to do so also, but no Qur’aanic revelation was revealed concerning it. However, during the second year after the *Hijrah,* Allaah revealed the following verse,

﴿ شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أُنزِلَ فِيهِ ٱلْقُرْءَانُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَٰتٍ مِّنَ ٱلْهُدَىٰ وَٱلْفُرْقَانِ ۚ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنكُمُ ٱلشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ ﴾

> **“Ramadaan is the month in which the Qur’aan was sent down...so whoever among you witnesses the (beginning of) the month should fast it.”**[40]

The fourth type of *naskh* is that of the *Sunnah* by the *Sunnah.* This type of *naskh* involves the annulment of a law found only in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ) by a later law expressed in the *Sunnah.* An example of this type of *naskh* can be found in the following statement of the *sahaabee* Jaabir ibn ‘Abdullaah: “*The latter of the Messenger of Allaah’s (ﷺ) two commands was to not make* wudoo’ *after (eating) things touched by fire.”*[41] In the early period of Islaam, the Prophet (ﷺ) had commanded his followers to make *wudoo’* before praying if they had eaten

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[38] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):144. See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 14, no. 13, for the circumstances of the revelation.
[39] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 24, no. 29) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, pp. 548-9, nos. 2499-503).
[40] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):185.
[41] Collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 1, pp. 46-7, no. 192), at-Tirmithee, an-Nasaa’ee and Ibn Maajah and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 1, p. 39, no. 177.

cooked food, but in the later period he told them that it was no longer necessary to do so.

The *naskh* of either the Qur'aan or the *Sunnah* by *ijmaa'* (unanimous agreement of the scholars) or *qiyaas* (analogous deduction) cannot occur, as neither *ijmaa'* or *qiyaas* are of divine origin. Both *ijmaa'* and *qiyaas* are the result of human intellectual effort, therefore, their conclusions are subject to error. So even though *ijmaa'* and *qiyaas* are considered to be two of the sources of Islaamic law (*fiqh*), they are not considered to be a part of *Sharee'ah* (divine law). However, they may be used when applying the *Sharee'ah* to circumstances not specified in the Qur'aan or *Sunnah*.[42]

Within the Qur'aan itself, *naskh* may occur in three different forms in relation to the recitation of the abrogated verse and validity of the abrogated law contained in the verse.

1. *Naskh* of the Verse and the Law

In the first form, not only is the law abolished and a new law put in its place, but also the verse which contained the old law is removed by divine decree from the Qur'aan itself. An example of this form can be found in the following statement of 'Aa'ishah: "*Among the revelations was the law that suckling ten distinct times by a wet nurse made marriage to her and her relatives prohibited, as in the case of the real mother's relatives. It was then replaced by the law of five distinct sucklings which was recited among the verses of the Qur'aan until shortly before the death of Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ).*"[43] This type of *naskh* is extremely rare.

2. *Naskh* of the Verse Alone, Not the Law

In this case, Allaah had the verse removed from the Qur'aan and its recitation stopped without replacing the law. This type of *naskh* is also uncommon, though not as uncommon as the first form.

Among the few examples of this type is the verse on stoning the adulterers, which was reported by 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab, the second Caliph.

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[42] See *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, pp. 150-1.
[43] *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 740, no. 3421.

(الشَّيْخُ وَالشَّيْخَةُ إِذَا زَنَيَا فَارْجُمُوهُمَا الْبَتَّةَ)

"If the elder man and woman commit adultery, stone them absolutely."[44]

This verse is not in the final form of the Qur'aan which the Prophet (ﷺ) left, but the law of stoning the adulterer to death was applied by the Prophet (ﷺ) himself on a number of occasions and is well recorded in *hadeeth.* It was also the practice of all the Rightly-Guided Caliphs after him.[45]

3. *Naskh* of the Law Alone, Not the Verse

This is the most common form of *naskh,* whereby a law contained in a verse is annulled by a new law in a new verse, but the old verse is left in the Qur'aan. A clear example of this form of the abrogation of the law in the following verse:

﴿ وَٱلَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَٰجًا وَصِيَّةً لِّأَزْوَٰجِهِم مَّتَٰعًا إِلَى ٱلْحَوْلِ غَيْرَ إِخْرَاجٍ ﴾

> **"For those among you who die and leave behind wives, the bequest instruction for your wives is that they be looked after (from your wealth) for a year without being expelled (from their dwellings)."**[46]

This verse was superseded by a later verse which stated,

﴿ وَٱلَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَٰجًا يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا ﴾

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[44] See *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 912, no. 4194, and Ibn Maajah. The wording of the verse is reported by Ibn Maajah, however this *hadeeth* has not yet been translated. (See *Mawsoo'ah al-Hadeeth ash-Shareef, Ibn Maajah*, The Book of *Hudood*, no. 2543.)

[45] See *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, pp. 911-922, nos. 4191-4225.

[46] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):240.

“For those among you who die and leave behind wives, let them (the wives) stay by themselves for four months and ten days (i.e., without remarrying).”[47]

THE TYPES OF REPLACEMENT

When a law was repealed, it was replaced by another law or not replaced at all. In the cases when it was replaced, the new law may either be less difficult, of similar difficulty, or more difficult. Thus, there are exactly four ways in which a law may be annulled with respect to its replacement.

1. *Naskh* Without Replacement

An example of this type was the repeal of *sadaqah* (a charitable gift for the poor) before private consultations with the Prophet (ﷺ). Allaah commanded the believers as follows:

﴿ يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا نَـٰجَيۡتُمُ ٱلرَّسُولَ فَقَدِّمُواْ بَيۡنَ يَدَىۡ نَجۡوَىٰكُمۡ صَدَقَةً ﴾

“O you who believe! If you wish to consult the Messenger in private, you should give some charity before your private consultation.”[48]

Later, He released them from the obligation, saying,

[47] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):234. It should be noted that although verse 240 follows verse 234 numerically, verse 234 was revealed after verse 240. However, the Prophet (ﷺ), under divine guidance, had the order changed when it was recorded and recited. See *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 40, no. 53.

[48] *Soorah al-Mujaadilah* (58):12.

﴿ ءَأَشۡفَقۡتُمۡ أَن تُقَدِّمُواْ بَيۡنَ يَدَيۡ نَجۡوَىٰكُمۡ صَدَقَٰتٖۚ فَإِذۡ لَمۡ تَفۡعَلُواْ وَتَابَ ٱللَّهُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ فَأَقِيمُواْ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتُواْ ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَأَطِيعُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ ﴾

"Are you afraid to give sums of charity before your private consultations? If then you do not do so and Allaah forgives you, you should establish regular prayer, pay *zakaah* and obey Allaah and His Messenger."[49]

2. *Naskh* by an Easier Law

This type of *naskh* occurred in relation to the laws of fasting. Ibn 'Umar reported that when the following verse was revealed:

﴿ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَتَّقُونَ ١٨٣ ﴾

"O you who believe: Fasting has been made com-pulsory for you in the same way that it was made for those before you,"[50]

food, drink, and intercourse were forbidden to them once they prayed the night prayer or went to sleep until the next sunset. Then Allaah revealed the verse,

﴿أُحِلَّ لَكُمۡ لَيۡلَةَ ٱلصِّيَامِ ٱلرَّفَثُ إِلَىٰ نِسَآئِكُمۡ﴾

[49] *Soorah al-Mujaadilah* (58):13
[50] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):183.

"Going to your women at night has been made lawful for you during the period of fasting."[51]

3. *Naskh* by a Similar Law

An example of this kind of *naskh* is the change of the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Makkah by the verse,

﴿ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ ٱلْمَسْجِدِ ٱلْحَرَامِ ۚ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنتُمْ فَوَلُّوا۟ وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُۥ ﴾

"So turn your face toward *al-Masjid al-Haraam,* and wherever you all may be, turn your faces toward it."[52]

4. *Naskh* by a More Difficult Law

A good example of this kind of *naskh* is the repeal of the law allowing those who did not want to fast to feed a poor person instead. The law which replaced it made fasting compulsory for all who were physically able.[53]

THE WISDOM OF *NASKH*

There is no doubt that the replacement of some laws with others was done for good and important reasons, as none of Allaah's action are in jest or without a purpose. Some of these reasons He has described, and others are obvious and deducible from His actions; however, there are others unknown to us and beyond our comprehension. Allaah's being is unknown to us and beyond our comprehension. Allaah's knowledge has no limits and includes all, so man cannot reasonably hope to grasp in totality the supreme wisdom behind Allaah's actions.

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[51] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):187. This report was collected by Ibn Abee Haatim. See also *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 28, no. 35.

[52] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):144. See "Naskh of the *Sunnah* by the Qur'aan" on p. 226.

[53] See number 1 under "Knowledge of *Naskh*" on p. 221.

In the case of *naskh,* it is possible to deduce the following principle reasons for it occurrence:

1. It is means of looking after the welfare of mankind by the evolution of divine laws to a stage of completion consistent with the development of human society.
2. It is used to test the believers with a variety of situations in which they are required to closely follow certain specific laws, while in others they are required not to follow them. This type of variation tests the willingness of the believers to submit to Allaah's commands as well as their faith in Allaah's wisdom.
3. It also shows that Allaah desires good and ease for the Islaamic nation. *Naskh* which repeals a law with one more difficult gives the believers an opportunity to earn a greater reward; the divine principle being that the greater the difficulty the greater the reward. On the other hand, *naskh* which replaces a law with an easier one gives the believers a break and reminds them of Allaah's wish of good for them.

Books Devoted to Abrogated Verses

Many scholars compiled books specifically on this topic. Perhaps the earliest of these was *an-Naasikh wa al-Mansookh fee Kitaab Allaah*, by Qataadah ibn Di'aamah (d. 737 CE/118 AH), a prominent *hadeeth* scholar from among the *taabi'een.* Other famous scholars who compiled works on the subject were Ibn Hazm ath-Thaahiree (d. 932 CE/320 AH), Ahmad ibn Muhammad an-Nahhaas (d. 950 CE/338 AH), Makee ibn Abee Taalib (d. 1046 CE/ 437AH) and Ibn al-Jawzee (d. 1201 CE/597 AH).[54]

[54] *Al-Qur'aan al-Kareem* (Arabic CD) under *ma'loomaat—maktabah al-Qur'aan.*

13

THE *MUHKAM* (CLEAR) AND *MUTASHAABIH* (OBSCURE) VERSES

The Qur'aan was revealed to mankind as a *furqaan*, a means of distinguishing between truth and falsehood in man's relationship with his Creator and with the creation in which he exists. The basic principles of these relationships have been clearly defined in the Qur'aan, leaving no room for speculation or doubt, and these are the principles which make up the essence of the Book (*umm al-kitaab*). For example, the principle of *salaah* (prayer) defines the primary relationship between man and God, while that of *zakaah* (institutionalized obligatory charity) defines a primary aspect of human relationship. It is from this viewpoint that Allaah describes the Qur'aan in the following verse:

﴿ كِتَٰبٌ فُصِّلَتْ ءَايَٰتُهُۥ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣﴾ ﴾

"A Book whose verses have been made clear, an Arabic reading for a people who are aware."[1]

Hence, the foundations for the unity of the Muslim nation (*Ummah*) are firmly laid down by the essential verses of the Qur'aan itself. These verses and the principles which they contain have been referred to as the *muhkamaat.*

However, since the Qur'aan addresses the mysteries of man and his world, there are, of necessity, vague and obscure references to aspects of realities about which man's knowledge is limited. Some of these references may only be understood in relationship to other verses, while the reality of other references cannot be understood at all. For example, the letters of the alphabet with which

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[1] *Soorah Fussilat*, (41):3.

some of the *soorahs* of the Qur'aan begin have no obvious meanings in themselves. Although they were used in ancient Arabic poetry, they were never used at the beginnings of verses, and the context would always indicate the intended meanings. An example of that can be found in the following couplet of Arabic poetry:

قُلْنَا لَهَا : قِفِيْ ، فَقَالَتْ : ق

Qulnaa lahaa: qifee, fa qaalat: qaaf[2]

(We said to her, "Stop," and she said, "*Qaaf.*" [short for *waqaftu,* "I have stopped."])

However, with regard to the Qur'aan, it has been noted by the early scholars that there is a mathematical relationship between the introductory letters and their occurrence in their respective *soorahs*, as well as in the other *soorahs* of the Qur'aan itself. For an illustrative example, let us examine *Soorah Qaaf,* which begins as follows:



"*Qaaf*, By the Glorious Qur'aan."

It has been shown that the Arabic letter *Qaaf* occurs more frequently in this *soorah* than any other letter of the Arabic alphabet. Also, the ratio of *Qaafs* to the total number of letters in this *soorah* is higher than in any of the other one hundred and thirteen *soorahs* of the Qur'aan.

However, the intended meaning of the letter *Qaaf* is unknown. Some commentators of the Qur'aan have speculated that it is abbreviation for the word "Qur'aan," while others have proposed that it represents the phrase, "*qudiyal-amr,*" ("the matter has been destined"). Since the last Prophet, Muhammad (ﷺ), to whom the Qur'aan was revealed, did not explain its meaning, and the grammatical context in which it is used does not indicate any obvious meaning, we can only honestly say that Allaah alone knows its reality.

[2] Mentioned by Ibn Faaris, and quoted in *Min 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, p. 136.

Another example in relation to man himself is that of the *rooh* (soul). Its existence is confirmed by revelation, as well as human experience, but its reality is unknown to man. Allaah, in the Qur'aan, points out its origin for us, saying,

﴿ وَيَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ ٱلرُّوحِ ۖ قُلِ ٱلرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّى ﴾

> **"They ask you about the *rooh;* tell them, 'The *rooh* comes from my Lord's command.' "**[3]

Hence, we know that the soul is created, but as to what it is created from, Allaah alone knows. We know other things about it, like the fact that an angel is responsible for placing it in the fetus at the beginning of the fifth month of its development, and another angel is responsible for extracting it from the human body when its appointed time of death has arrived, etc.[4] But how it was created, its form, its place in the body, or how it is connected to the body is not part of our knowledge.

In relation to man and his world, an example can be found in the references to the next life and the final hour. Fruits and drinks of paradise and Hell are mentioned by name, but as Ibn 'Abbaas (رضي الله عنه) explained, only the names are similar; their realities are totally different.[5] Allaah Himself indicates that by mentioning some of their unique qualities, such as rivers of flowing milk that never sours or wine that does not intoxicate, a scale that weighs deeds and the skins of those doomed to the Fire, which grow back again as soon as the fire has burnt them.

Similarly, knowledge of the appointed time for the end of this world is unknown. Although many of the signs have been mentioned in the Qur'aan and *Sunnah*, and the process of disintegration has been vividly described, the exact time of its occurrence is completely hidden from man. Hence, Qur'aanic references to the Final Hour and the components of the next life are always vague.

The Qur'aanic verses that speak on the mysteries of creation and the Creator in such a way that their reality remains obscure are referred to as the

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[3] *Soorah al-Israa'* (17):85.
[4] See *Qur'aan* 32:11 and *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, pp. 1391-3, nos. 6390-7.
[5] Collected by Ibn Abee Haatim and Ibn Jareer. See *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*, vol. 1, p. 66.

"*mutashaabihaat.*" The Qur'aan has described itself in various verses as being entirely *muhkam,* in one verse as being entirely *mutashaabih*, and in another verse as being partially *muhkam* and partially *mutashaabih.* There is no contradiction here, because the first two cases use the words in their general sense, while the final one uses the words according to a more technical meaning. Since the general meaning of the Arabic term *muhkam* is "perfected" or "completely formed," the whole Qur'aan may be referred to as being *muhkam* in respect to it construction, its logic, and its message. Hence, we find Allaah referring to the Qur'aan as follows:

﴿ الٓر ۚ كِتَٰبٌ أُحۡكِمَتۡ ءَايَٰتُهُۥ ثُمَّ فُصِّلَتۡ مِن لَّدُنۡ حَكِيمٍ خَبِيرٍ ١ ﴾

"*Alif, Laam, Raa.* A Book from the Wise and Aware (Allaah), whose verses were made *muhkam*, then explained."[6]

Likewise, Allaah applied the general meaning of *mutashaabih,* "mutually resembling one another" or "similar," to the whole Qur'aan in the following verse:

﴿ ٱللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحۡسَنَ ٱلۡحَدِيثِ كِتَٰبًا مُّتَشَٰبِهًا مَّثَانِيَ ﴾

"Allaah has revealed the best speech (in the form of) a *mutashaabih* book repeating (its message)."[7]

That is, all of the verses of the Qur'aan resemble each other in their rhythmic and poetic perfection, and they all mutually confirm each other's meanings.

However, the specific meanings of these two terms play a very important role in the science of *tafseer*. Those meanings are contained in the following verse, along with a very stern warning:

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[6] *Soorah Hood* (11):1.
[7] *Soorah az-Zumar* (39):23.

﴿ هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَنزَلَ عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِنۡهُ ءَايَٰتٌ مُّحۡكَمَٰتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَٰبِهَٰتٌۖ فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ فِى قُلُوبِهِمۡ زَيۡغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَٰبَهَ مِنۡهُ ٱبۡتِغَآءَ ٱلۡفِتۡنَةِ وَٱبۡتِغَآءَ تَأۡوِيلِهِۦۗ وَمَا يَعۡلَمُ تَأۡوِيلَهُۥٓ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُۗ وَٱلرَّٰسِخُونَ فِى ٱلۡعِلۡمِ يَقُولُونَ ءَامَنَّا بِهِۦ كُلٌّ مِّنۡ عِندِ رَبِّنَاۗ وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّآ أُوْلُواْ ٱلۡأَلۡبَٰبِ ٧ ﴾

"It is He Who revealed the Book to you; in it are *muhkamaat* verses which are the essence of the Book (*umm al-kitaab*) and other (verses) which are *mutashaabihaat.* As for those whose hearts are twisted, they follow the *mutashaabih*, seeking to sow discord and searching for its inner meanings, but no one knows its inner meaning except Allaah. And those firmly grounded in knowledge say, 'We believe in it, as it is all from our Lord.' Yet, none will realize (this) except the wise."[8]

Hence, the *muhkam* could be defined as those verses whose meanings are clear, and the *mutashaabih* as those verses whose inner meanings are known only to Allaah. 'Aa'ishah reported that once the Prophet (ﷺ) recited the above mentioned verse and said,

(فَإِذَا رَأَيْتِ الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ فَأُولَئِكِ الَّذِينَ سَمَّى اللَّهُ فَاحْذَرُوهُمْ .)

"*If you meet those who seek out the obscure verses* (mutashaabih), *they are the ones whom Allaah has named in the Qur'aan, so beware of them.*"[9]

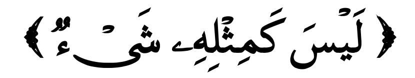
The concepts of *muhkam* and *mutashaabih* provide a set of guidelines by which the Qur'aan should be understood. The system of *fiqh* (Islaamic law) has

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[8] *Soorah Aal 'Imraan* (3):7.

[9] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, pp. 53-4, no. 70) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1402, no. 6442).

evolved from the *muhkamaat* verses. The early scholars concentrated on those verses which had direct relevance to human actions, the verses which could be applied and interpreted according to logical and universally acceptable grammatical principles. However, those who sought to destroy the message of Islaam from within began their attack at the very source, the Qur'aan. The *muhkamaat* verses do not lend themselves to philosophical interpretations. Hence, the *mutashaabihaat* became the pillars upon which counter-Islaam was built, and Allaah's names and attributes became the starting point. For example, Allaah describes Himself in Qur'aan as *al-Baseer,* the Seer, and *as-Samee*', the Hearer, among His many names and attributes. During the era of the Prophet (ﷺ) and that of the four Righteous Caliphs after his death, the *sahaabah* understood the verses containing these attributes according to their obvious meanings without delving into the why and the hows. To them, Allaah sees and hears all things without resembling His creation in any way. However, after the era of the *sahaabah,* the argument was raised by some that seeing and hearing were human or animal characteristics which required particular sensory apparatuses not befitting the Lord God Almighty. He had already said in the Qur'aan that:



"Nothing is like Him."[10]

As a result, a school of philosophy known as the Jahmeeyah arose, which denied Allaah's names and attributes. Out of this school evolved another, the Mu'tazilah, which toned down clearly heretical statements of Jahm ibn Safwaan with Greek logic and rationalist interpretations of the texts of the Qur'aan and *Sunnah.* Under the patronage of the early 'Abasssid rulers, this school engulfed the *Ummah*, to the degree that its concepts became the norm, and those who opposed them were systematically persecuted. Allaah's names were recognized, but were made void of any meaning, and His attributes of sight and hearing were taken to mean knowledge.

In time, there arose others among the *Ummah* who claimed that **all** of the Qur'aan was *mutashaabih* and that they alone knew its real meanings. They called the outer meanings the *thaahir* or the *Sharee'ah* and the inner meanings were

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[10] *Soorah ash-Shooraa* (42):11.

termed the *baatin* or the *haqeeqah*. Some claimed that the inner meanings were handed down secretly through the Prophet's descendants, whom they named imaams, while others claimed that they were passed down through a chain of *shaykhs* or spiritual leaders.

Fortunately, the Qur'aanic description of this trend as being a result of twisted hearts and deviation and the Prophet's warning to the Muslim *Ummah* to avoid those who take this path aid us in continuing to hold high the essential purity and clarity of the Qur'aanic message contained in the *muhkamaat* verses.

14

LITERARY FORM OF THE QUR'AAN

A brief glimpse through a few of the Qur'aan's passages immediately reveals that a wide variety of literary forms have been employed in it. The utilization of a variety of literary forms does not simply provide a flowery or elaborate presentation which dazzles the reader or listener, but conveys the unique message of the Qur'aan in the most effective way. As was mentioned in a previous chapter, the aim of the Qur'aan is essentially the guidance of man in three spheres: in his relationship with God, with himself, and with the human society in which he exists. This aim permeates every verse and chapter from the beginning of the Qur'aan until the last verse of its last chapter, number one hundred and fourteen. Thus a variety of literary forms were used to bring this message home to the reader without being monotonous or seemingly repetitious. Many of the forms are unique to the Arabic language and its constructions, while others are very intricate and appreciable only to literary and linguistic experts. In this chapter we will briefly explore four of the more basic literary forms employed throughout the Qur'aan: the *mathal* (simile, proverb, and metaphor), the *qasam* (oath), the *jadal* (debate), and the *qissah* (narrative).

THE *MATHAL*

Although the term *mathal* is commonly translated as simile or metaphor, in the context of the Qur'aan it includes proverbs, and even ideals. Hence, the definition of a *mathal* according to the Islaamic sciences is a concise but impressive and moving literary passage in which an idea is expressed, regardless of its construction. The *mathal* in the Qur'aan comes in three basic forms, the

musarrah mathal (stated), the *kaamin mathal* (hidden), and the *mursal mathal* (formless).[11]

1. The *Mathal Musarrah* (Stated)

This form, as the name implies, contains an obvious comparison and is widely used in the Qur'aan.[12] Such examples may be found in the fire and water similes and metaphors used in reference to the hypocrites who feign Islaam:

﴿ مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ ٱلَّذِى ٱسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّآ أَضَآءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُۥ ذَهَبَ
ٱللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِى ظُلُمَٰتٍ لَّا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٧﴾ صُمٌّۢ بُكْمٌ عُمْىٌ
فَهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿١٨﴾ أَوْ كَصَيِّبٍ مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَٰتٌ وَرَعْدٌ
وَبَرْقٌ يَجْعَلُونَ أَصَٰبِعَهُمْ فِىٓ ءَاذَانِهِم مِّنَ ٱلصَّوَٰعِقِ حَذَرَ ٱلْمَوْتِ ۚ وَٱللَّهُ
مُحِيطٌۢ بِٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٩﴾ يَكَادُ ٱلْبَرْقُ يَخْطَفُ أَبْصَٰرَهُمْ ۖ كُلَّمَآ أَضَآءَ
لَهُم مَّشَوْا۟ فِيهِ وَإِذَآ أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا۟ ۚ وَلَوْ شَآءَ ٱللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ
بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَٰرِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٠﴾ ﴾

"They are like one who kindles a fire; then when it lights up what is around him, Allaah takes away his light and leaves him in total darkness in which he cannot see (anything). They are deaf, dumb, and blind; hence, they will never return to the path. Or like a dark rain cloud, thundering and flashing lightning in the sky, (during which) they stick their fingers in their ears from the thunderclap, fearing death. But Allaah surrounds the disbelievers. The lightning almost

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[11] *Mabaahith fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan*, p. 293.

[12] *Al-Itqaan*, vol.4, p. 39.

snatches away their sight, but every time it lights up (the area) for them, they walk, and when it becomes dark, they stand still. If Allaah had willed, He could have taken away their hearing and sight, for certainly Allaah is able to do all things."[13]

Fire is used in this passage due to its quality of light, and water is used due to its ability to bring earth back to life. Fire and water really represent the elements. Revelation was sent down from the heavens to enlighten human hearts and bring them to life. In these verses, Allaah uses fire and water to explain the effect of revelation on those who pretend to be Muslims. The hypocrites who enter Islaam so as to benefit from it materially are like someone who lights a fire in order to benefit from its warmth and light. However, their entrance into Islaam has no enlightening effect on their hearts; likewise, Allaah removes the quality of light from the fire leaving only its quality of heat. Hence, they are in total darkness, blind, unable to see the truth. The hypocrites are also like someone in a rainstorm fearing death from its flashes of lightning and trying to avoid its mind-shattering thunderclap. Instead of coming to life spiritually when God's word is revealed to them, the hypocrites try to block out its thundering commands and prohibitions, fearing that submission to them would mean the death of their souls and egos.

Another *mathal* involving fire and water can be found in the following verse concerning truth and falsehood.

﴿ أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَسَالَتۡ أَوۡدِيَةُۢ بِقَدَرِهَا فَٱحۡتَمَلَ
ٱلسَّيۡلُ زَبَدٗا رَّابِيٗاۚ وَمِمَّا يُوقِدُونَ عَلَيۡهِ فِي ٱلنَّارِ ٱبۡتِغَآءَ حِلۡيَةٍ أَوۡ
مَتَٰعٖ زَبَدٞ مِّثۡلُهُۥۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَضۡرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡحَقَّ وَٱلۡبَٰطِلَۚ فَأَمَّا ٱلزَّبَدُ
فَيَذۡهَبُ جُفَآءٗۖ وَأَمَّا مَا يَنفَعُ ٱلنَّاسَ فَيَمۡكُثُ فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِۚ كَذَٰلِكَ
يَضۡرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلۡأَمۡثَالَ ١٧ ﴾

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[13] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):17-20.

> **“He sends down water from the skies which flows in valleys according to their capacities, and the flood carries swelling froth on its surface; there is a similar froth in the (ore) which they heat in the fire in order to make ornaments or implements. In this way, Allaah makes a comparison between truth and falsehood. For the froth is thrown away and disappears, while that which is beneficial to man remains on earth. In this way, Allaah makes parables.”**[14]

Once again, revelation, which is sent down to bring hearts to life, is likened to water coming down to bring the earth to life with plants. Human hearts are the metaphorical valleys of varying sizes in which the flood of revelation flows accordingly. As the physical flood carries the froth and scum of the earth in its currents, so guidance and knowledge flow upon the hearts to wash away base desires. Hearts are then likened to different types of ore, such as gold, silver, iron, copper, etc., which are purified by the heat of the fire. Impurities rise to the surface in the form of froth and scum which are discarded, leaving the pure metal behind. Likewise, when the hearts of believers are exposed to the heat and light of revelation, evil desires are cast off and the hearts are purified.

In both of the examples given above, the comparison between both fire and revelation and water and revelation is obvious. The comparative preposition “like” and the words “comparison, parable, simile” are all mentioned, leaving no doubt as to the intent of the passages.

2. The *Mathal Kaamin* (Hidden)

In this form, the terms of comparison are not used.[15] However, this type of *mathal* conveys Islaamic ideals readily acceptable to natural human instincts due to the deep and impressive meanings which they imply. For example, the concept of the middle road between the two extremes is beautifully expressed in many verses of the Qur’aan. In the case of spending, Allaah praises those

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[14] *Soorah ar-Ra‘d* (13):17.
[15] *Al-Itqaan*, vol.4, p. 41.

﴿ وَٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَنفَقُواْ لَمْ يُسْرِفُواْ وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُواْ وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ قَوَامًا ﴿٦٧﴾ ﴾

"Who are neither extravagant nor stingy when they spend; but between that is a just stand."[16]

And in the case of *salaah,* Allaah advises:

﴿ وَلَا تَجْهَرْ بِصَلَاتِكَ وَلَا تُخَافِتْ بِهَا وَٱبْتَغِ بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ سَبِيلًا ﴿١١٠﴾ ﴾

"Do not be loud voiced nor extremely soft in your *salaah,* but seek a path between them."[17]

Another example of beautiful expression may be found in the concept that hearing is not like seeing. In the West, a more extreme version of this concept is often quoted as, "Seeing is believing." However, life is too full of instances where we believe in things without seeing them (magnetism, the mind, wind, etc.) for that saying to be accurate. The Islaamic precept is that seeing a thing produces a stronger belief than merely hearing about it. Hence, when Prophet Ibraaheem requested that Allaah show him how He brings life to the dead, Allaah said,

﴿ قَالَ أَوَلَمْ تُؤْمِن ۖ قَالَ بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِى ﴾

"Do you not believe?" He replied, "Of course (I believe), but (seeing) would put my heart at rest."[18]

3. The *Mathal Mursal* (Formless)

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[16] *Soorah al-Furqaan* (25):67.
[17] *Soorah al-Israa'* (17):110.
[18] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):260.

This form covers short verses which convey lessons, many of which have become proverbs. Like the *mathal kaamin,* it has none of the expressions or similes; however, comparisons may be made or implied.[19] The following verses clearly illustrate this type of *mathal:*

﴿ وَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تَكۡرَهُواْ شَيۡـٔٗا وَهُوَ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡ ﴾

"Perhaps you may dislike something which is good for you."[20]

﴿ هَلۡ جَزَآءُ ٱلۡإِحۡسَٰنِ إِلَّا ٱلۡإِحۡسَٰنُ ٦٠ ﴾

"Is the reward for good anything but good?"[21]

﴿ لَّا يَسۡتَوِي ٱلۡخَبِيثُ وَٱلطَّيِّبُ ﴾

"The foul and the wholesome are not equal."[22]

﴿ كَم مِّن فِئَةٖ قَلِيلَةٍ غَلَبَتۡ فِئَةٗ كَثِيرَةَۢ بِإِذۡنِ ٱللَّهِۗ ﴾

"How often a small group has defeated a larger group by Allaah's permission."[23]

﴿ تَحۡسَبُهُمۡ جَمِيعٗا وَقُلُوبُهُمۡ شَتَّىٰۚ ﴾

"You think they are united, but their hearts are scattered."[24]

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[19] *Al-Itqaan*, vol. 4, p. 43.
[20] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):216.
[21] *Soorah ar-Rahmaan* (55):60.
[22] *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):100.
[23] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):249.
[24] *Soorah al-Hashr* (59):14.

The benefits gained from the use of the *mathal* in the Qur’aan are numerous.[25] Intangible concepts are presented in a tangible format in order for them to be more easily grasped and retained. Concepts which may be quite difficult to grasp on a theoretical basis become quickly and easily comprehensible when put in the terms of everyday human experiences or processes in nature. For example, the idea that one who gives money for show gains no reward is tangibly brought across by the following simile:

﴿ فَمَثَلُهُۥ كَمَثَلِ صَفۡوَانٍ عَلَيۡهِ تُرَابٞ فَأَصَابَهُۥ وَابِلٞ فَتَرَكَهُۥ
صَلۡدٗاۖ لَّا يَقۡدِرُونَ عَلَىٰ شَيۡءٖ مِّمَّا كَسَبُواْ ﴾

“They are like a rock covered with some earth which is struck by a rainstorm, leaving it bare. They are unable to do anything with (the wealth) they have earned.”[26]

Sometimes the *mathal* is used to encourage people to do certain righteous acts by comparing them to something which is appealing to human nature. An example of this function may be found in the verse:

﴿ مَّثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمۡوَٰلَهُمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنۢبَتَتۡ
سَبۡعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ سُنۢبُلَةٖ مِّاْئَةُ حَبَّةٖۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُضَٰعِفُ لِمَن يَشَآءُ ﴾

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[25] See *Mabaa<u>h</u>ith fee ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan*, pp. 297-9.
[26] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):264.

"Those who spend their wealth in Allaah's path are like a corn seed which sprouts seven ears, each ear containing one hundred seeds. Allaah multiplies (the gifts) of whomsoever He wishes."[27]

At other times, the *mathal* is used to discourage certain evil practices by comparing them to distasteful things. For example, Allaah said the following concerning backbiting:

﴿ وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا ۚ أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ ﴾

"Do not backbite each other. Would anyone of you wish to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You detest it..."[28]

The revulsion we all feel at the thought of eating the flesh of our dead brother should be felt when we hear slander or backbiting.

The *mathal* may also be used to praise certain types of individuals or disgrace and debase others in order to set up certain standards of acceptable behavior. Figurative speech is generally a more moving and effective method of communica-tion than direct commands and detailed explanations. Hence, Allaah has used them frequently in the Qur'aan:

﴿ وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانِ مِن كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾ ﴾

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[27] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):261.
[28] *Soorah al-Hujuraat* (49):12.

“Certainly I have made all kinds of parables (*mathal*) in the Qur’aan for mankind that perhaps they would reflect.”[29]

There are also numerous examples in the statements of the Prophet (ﷺ) where he relied on the *mathal* to get his message across. [30]

THE *QASAM*

The oath (*qasam*) in Arabic, as in English, is used to emphasize in the mind of the reader or listener the importance or truthfulness of the idea which follows it in the sentence. In English, the most common format is “by God,” wherein “by” represents the phrase “as surely as I believe in.” However, Arabic linguists have traditionally divided the format of the oath into three basic parts:

1. the verb: “I swear by;”
2. the person, thing, or event by which the oath is taken;
3. the person, thing, or event on which the oath is taken.[31]

The phrase, “I swear by” (*aqsimu bi*) is often reduced to the particle “by” (“*bi*”), and “*ta*” and “*wa*” are often used in place of “*bi.*” These particles are then joined to the person or thing by which the oath is taken. Hence the oath, “I swear by Allaah,” may be expressed in Arabic as, “*Aqsimu bil-laah,*” “*bil-laah,*” “*tal-laah,*” or “*wal-laah.*” Occasionally both the verb, the particle, and the person or thing by which the oath is taken are all deleted, leaving only the person, thing, or event on which the oath is taken, prefixed with *la,* a particle of emphasis. An example of this type of deletion can be found in the verse,

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[29] *Soorah az-Zumar* (39):27.

[30] They are too numerous to begin to list, but just as a tiny sample, refer to the simile of the people who observe the limits set by Allaah and those who don’t as people on the upper and lower decks of a ship (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 3, p. 406, no. 673). See also *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, p. 278, no. 468, for a simile of the believers as a structure whose bricks support each other.

[31] *Mabaahith fee ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan*, p. 300.

﴿ لَتُبْلَوُنَّ فِىٓ أَمْوَٰلِكُمْ وَأَنفُسِكُمْ ﴾

"Certainly you will be tested (*latublawunna*) in your wealth and your lives."[32]

This verse should read, "[By Allaah,] you will certainly be tested." In the Qur'aan, the vast majority of oaths are made by created things; for example,

﴿ وَٱلشَّمْسِ وَضُحَىٰهَا ۝١ وَٱلْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَىٰهَا ۝٢ ﴾

"By the Sun and the early morn, by the moon when it follows it."[33]

However, there are exactly seven places where oaths are made by Allaah.[34] Allaah commands the Prophet (ﷺ) to swear by Allaah in three of those places, as in the following example:

﴿ زَعَمَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ أَن لَّن يُبْعَثُوا۟ ۚ قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّى لَتُبْعَثُنَّ ثُمَّ لَتُنَبَّؤُنَّ بِمَا عَمِلْتُمْ ﴾

"Those who disbelieve claim that they will never be resurrected. Say, 'Certainly, by my Lord, you will be resurrected, then you will be informed of what you did.' "[35]

In the remaining four instances, Allaah swears by Himself, as in the following example:

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[32] *Soorah Aal 'Imraan* (3):186.
[33] *Soorah ash-Shams* (91):1-2.
[34] *Al-Itqaan*, vol. 4, p. 46.
[35] *Soorah at-Taghaabun* (64):7.

﴿ فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ﴾

"By your Lord, they will not truly believe until they make you the judge in their disputes."[36]

Allaah, being the creator of all things may swear by whatever he wishes; however, man is not allowed to swear by anything but Allaah. The reason being that oaths are taken by the things which one holds in the highest of esteem and only Allaah should be revered in this manner. Hence, oaths by the stars, by one's father's grave or even by the Prophet (ﷺ) or by the Ka'bah are all forbidden and considered *shirk* (associating partners with Allaah). The Righteous Caliph and close companion of the Prophet (ﷺ), 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab, reported that Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) said,

(مَنْ حَلَفَ بِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ أَشْرَكَ .)

"*Whoever swears by other than Allaah has associated a partner with Allaah.*"[37]

Almighty Allaah swears by the wonders of His creation because they all point to Him as the Creator and Sustainer.

Occasionally in the Qur'aan, the very thing or event on which an oath is taken may be deleted. Deletion in this case may be due to the clarity of the context and the implication of the oath itself; for example, the oaths:

﴿ لَآ أُقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ ٱلْقِيَـٰمَةِ ۝١ وَلَآ أُقْسِمُ بِٱلنَّفْسِ ٱللَّوَّامَةِ ۝٢ ﴾

"Verily, I swear by the Day of Resurrection and I swear by the self admonishing soul,"[38]

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[36] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):65.
[37] Collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 2, p. 923, no. 3245) and at-Tirmithee and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 2, p. 627, no. 2787.
[38] *Soorah al-Qiyaamah* (75):1-2.

and the verse following them:

﴿ أَيَحْسَبُ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ أَلَّن نَّجْمَعَ عِظَامَهُۥ ﴿٣﴾ ﴾

"Does the human being think that I will never gather his bones back together?"[39]

indicate that the missing events on which the oaths were taken are, "you will be resurrected and judged." This type of deletion in Arabic is used to dramatically increase the effect of the passage, much in the same way that warnings are orally expressed in English; for example, "You had better stop doing that, or else!"

THE *JADAL* (DEBATE)

The desire to be convinced by logical arguments is a part of human nature. Human beings, generally speaking, like to argue and debate even about things which their limited knowledge cannot verify to be correct or incorrect. Allaah alluded to this nature in the Qur'aan, saying,

﴿ وَكَانَ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ أَكْثَرَ شَىْءٍ جَدَلًا ﴿٥٤﴾ ﴾

"Certainly, the human being is the most argumen-tative creature!"[40]

Consequently, Allaah ordered the Prophet (ﷺ) to enter into debates with the pagans, but only in a gentle way which might move their hearts:

﴿ ٱدْعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِٱلْحِكْمَةِ وَٱلْمَوْعِظَةِ ٱلْحَسَنَةِ ۖ وَجَٰدِلْهُم بِٱلَّتِى هِىَ أَحْسَنُ ﴾

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[39] *Soorah al-Qiyaamah* (75):3.

[40] *Soorah al-Kahf* (18):54. The verse could also be translated, **"Certainly, humanity is more than anything argumentative."**

"Call to the path of your Lord with wisdom and good admonishment and debate with them in the best way."[41]

He also allowed Muslims to have discussions with the Christians and Jews in order to bring the truth to light:

﴿ وَلَا تُجَٰدِلُوٓاْ أَهۡلَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ إِلَّا بِٱلَّتِي هِيَ أَحۡسَنُ ﴾

"Only debate in the best manner with the people who follow revealed books."[42]

Since the Qur'aan addresses man, it is only natural that this aspect of human nature be taken into account when topics are presented. Hence, numerous examples of debate (*jadal*) can be found throughout the Qur'aan. However, the arguments raised in the Qur'aan are very simple and easily understood, as they always rely in one way or another on observable facts to prove the unobservable. The following are a few types of arguments found in the Qur'aan:

1. Harmony in creation implies a single creator:

﴿ لَوۡ كَانَ فِيهِمَآ ءَالِهَةٌ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا ﴾

"If there were in the (heavens and earth) gods beside Allaah, they would be ruined."[43]

There would be no order and harmony to this world if it had two or more true creators. For if they differed on how any aspect of creation should be, there would

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[41] *Soorah an-Nahl* (16):125.
[42] *Soorah al-'Ankaboot* (29):46.
[43] *Soorah al-Ambiyaa'* (21):22.

be chaos unless they all agreed or they submitted to the decision of one of them. Agreement or submission both imply an inability and weakness which no true creator should possess. In fact, such descriptions of weakness reduce the Creator of the universe to the status of a squabbling family of human beings in the way that the Greeks, Romans, Hindus, and Egyptians, etc., imagined their gods to be.

2. The process of creation implies the possibility of re-creation (resurrection):

﴿ أَيَحۡسَبُ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُ أَن يُتۡرَكَ سُدًى ﴿٣٦﴾ أَلَمۡ يَكُ نُطۡفَةٗ مِّن مَّنِيّٖ يُمۡنَىٰ ﴿٣٧﴾ ثُمَّ كَانَ عَلَقَةٗ فَخَلَقَ فَسَوَّىٰ ﴿٣٨﴾ فَجَعَلَ مِنۡهُ ٱلزَّوۡجَيۡنِ ٱلذَّكَرَ وَٱلۡأُنثَىٰٓ ﴿٣٩﴾ أَلَيۡسَ ذَٰلِكَ بِقَٰدِرٍ عَلَىٰٓ أَن يُحۡـِۧيَ ٱلۡمَوۡتَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾ ﴾

"Does the human being think that he will be left without responsibility? Was he not first a mere drop of ejaculated sperm?[44] Then he became a leech-like clot which Allaah gave form and balance? And from it He made the sexes, male and female? Is not the One who did this able to give life to the dead?"[45]

If one reflects on how humans are wondrously created and molded from such lowly origins, there should be no difficulty in conceiving the re-creation and resurrection of humanity. For the re-creation of a thing is always easier than its initial creation, as Allaah explicitly stated:

﴿ وَهُوَ ٱلَّذِي يَبۡدَؤُاْ ٱلۡخَلۡقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُۥ وَهُوَ أَهۡوَنُ عَلَيۡهِ ﴾

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[44] The word *manee* is usually translated as sperm, but it can refer to the fluid of the female as well. See *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 181-2, no. 614.

[45] *Soorah al-Qiyaamah* (75):36-40.

"And He is the One Who originates the creation, then He will reproduce it, and it is easier for Him." [46]

THE *QISSAH* (NARRATIVE)

Everyone likes to hear information conveyed in the form of a story. The human mind seems to relax and be comfortable in the psychological environment created by narratives. Conse-quently, stories and their authors have always been held in high esteem by societies throughout the world. Oftentimes, social criticisms have found their widest audiences through the vehicle of the story. For example, in *David Copperfield*, Charles Dickens attacked the exploitation of children by Victorian society; likewise, in *1984,* George Orwell commented on state interference in the lives of its citizens. Stories about people and civilizations of the past are especially interesting because they represent mysteries to the people of the present. Hence the Qur'aan has, in a number of instances, employed the narrative (*qissah*) format in order to convey its message to man in an intriguing manner. Qur'aanic stories also served to reassure the Prophet (ﷺ) and his followers that the truth would eventually win out over falsehood, and they continue to serve the same purpose for believers today. It should be noted, however, that while many of the most popular narratives are made up by their authors, the Qur'aanic stories are all true. They are not made up by Allaah to convey His message, but are in fact true historical examples of the message. This fact has been emphasized in the Qur'aan in numerous passages by Allaah, Who refers to Himself as the embodiment of Truth:

﴿ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِهِۦ هُوَ ٱلْبَٰطِلُ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ هُوَ ٱلْعَلِيُّ ٱلْكَبِيرُ ﴿٦٢﴾ ﴾

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[46] *Soorah ar-Room* (30):27.

“Certainly it is Allaah Who is truth and whatever you worship beside Him is falsehood.”[47]

Allaah refers to the Qur’aan as truth:

﴿ وَأَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَـٰبَ بِٱلْحَقِّ ﴾

“I revealed the Book to you in truth.”[48]

and,

﴿ وَٱلَّذِىٓ أَوْحَيْنَآ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ هُوَ ٱلْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ ﴾

“What I have revealed to you of the Book is the truth, confirming that which preceded it.”[49]

And Allaah specifically states that the stories which He relates are true:

﴿ نَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْكَ مِن نَّبَإِ مُوسَىٰ وَفِرْعَوْنَ بِٱلْحَقِّ ﴾

“I recite to you the true story of Moosaa and Pharoaoh.”[50]

Likewise, Allaah repudiates the idea that these narratives are invented. At the end of the story of Yoosuf and his brothers, He says,

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[47] *Soorah al-Hajj* (22):62.
[48] *Soorah al-Maa’idah* (5):48.
[49] *Soorah Faatir* (35):31.
[50] *Soorah al-Qasas* (28):3.

﴿ لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِّأُوْلِي ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ ۗ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ وَلَٰكِن تَصْدِيقَ ٱلَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ ﴾

"In their stories there is definitely a lesson for those possessing understanding. It is no invented story but a confirmation of the previous (scripture).[51]

The *qissahs* in the Qur'aan may be divided into three main categories, the first being narratives about the prophets. In such narratives, Allaah explains the various methods which they used to call their people to God, the miracles which they were given, the position of their people towards them, and the end result of the struggle between belief and disbelief. Examples of this type can be found in the stories of the Prophets Nooh (Noah), Ibraaheem (Abraham), Moosaa (Moses), Haaroon (Aaron), and 'Eesaa (Jesus), may Allaah's peace and blessings be on all of them. The second category is that of narratives concerning events and people not known to be prophets, such as the stories of Taaloot (Saul) and Jaaloot (Goliath), the sons of Aadam, the People of the Cave, Thul-Qarnayn, Qaaroon (Korah), Mary, the mother of Jesus, and so on. The third category is that of events which occurred during Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) era. For example, the Battles of Badr and Uhud in *Soorah Aal 'Imraan,* the Battles of Hunayn and Tabook in *Soorah at-Tawbah,* the Battle of the Clans (*Ahzaab*) in *Soorah al-Ahzaab,* and the Night Journey (*Israa'*) in *Soorah al-Israa',* and so on.

Some of the Qur'aanic stories are repeated in different sections of the Qur'aan. However, the stories are usually repeated in different ways. Sometimes, only a brief summary of a story is given, while at other times, one aspect of the story or another is related in detail. In fact, the details of stories are often mentioned only to the degree necessary for the message to be conveyed. Repetition of a story in this fashion firmly establishes its lesson in the mind of the reader. Sometimes, however, different aspects of the story have different underlying lessons. This type of repetition also reinforces the Qur'aan's miraculous nature, whereby a concept may be expressed in a variety of ways, yet the Arabs were unable to duplicate any of them.

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[51] *Soorah Yoosuf* (12):111.

15

LANGUAGE OF THE QUR'AAN

Islaamic laws and principles, like all laws, have certain general and specific goals which they are designed to achieve. In order to achieve these goals, the laws address society under a given set of circumstances. Sometimes the laws are directed to all people of the society under all circumstances, sometimes to all people under specific circumstances, at other times to particular people in special situations, and at other times to particular people in all situations. Hence, the language by which these laws are delivered has to accurately distinguish between the various cases in order to avoid any confusion and misinterpretation. The Arabic language in which the Qur'aan was conveyed has a number of words, phrases and grammatical constructions which express the various shades of meanings necessary to clarify the intent of the laws. Some of these expressions will be briefly studied in this chapter in order to give the reader a glimpse of some of the modes of expression.

'Aamm (General) and *Khaass* (Specific)

The *'aamm* could be defined as an expression which is completely general in whatever it refers to when used literally.[52] However, *'aamm* expressions may refer to specific things when they are used figuratively. The *khaass,* on the other hand, is used for a word which is applied to a limited number of things; for

[52] An alternate definition is "a word which applies to many things, not limited in number, and includes everything to which it is applicable." (*Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 104.)

instance, if one were ordered to feed ten poor people, that expression would be *khaass*.[53]

It should be noted that certain *'aamm* expressions are more comprehensive than others. For instance, the category of men is a smaller category than the category of human beings, which includes it. The category of human beings, in turn, is smaller than the category of mammals, which is smaller than the category of animals, and so on.[54] When an *'aamm* expression is qualified or restricted by another more limited *'aamm* expression or a *khaass* expression, the process is called *takhsees*, and the limiting expression is called the *mukhassis* of the broader category.[55]

The following six examples contain the most commonly used general expressions which can be found in the Qur'aan:[56]

1. *Kull* (all, every, or each): This word could be translated into English in a variety of ways, depending on the context. An example of this word's usage can be found in Allaah's statements in the Qur'aan:



"Every (*kull*) soul will taste death."[57]

﴿ ٱللَّهُ خَٰلِقُ كُلِّ شَيۡءٖ ﴾

"Allaah is the Creator of all (*kull*) things."[58]

These two verses confirm the fact that all things have a beginning point at which they were created and every living soul must come to an end of its existence.

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[53] *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, pp. 104-5.
[54] See *Sharh al-Kawkab al-Muneer*, vol. 3, p. 105.
[55] See *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 406.
[56] See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 3, pp. 43-4.
[57] *Soorah Aal 'Imraan* (3):185.
[58] *Soorah az-Zumar* (39):62.

Hence, Islaam rejects as false the Biblical figure 'Melchizedek,'[59] concerning whom a chapter of unknown authorship called "The Letter to the Hebrews" says, "He (Melchizedek) is without father or mother or genealogy and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the son of God he continues a priest forever."[60]

2. *Al* (of definiteness, not in reference to something known to the readers): Although "*al*" is normally translated as "the," in this case it translates as "all" or "every." For example, the verse:

﴿ وَأَحَلَّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ ٱلرِّبَوٰاْ ﴾

"Allaah has made *al-bay'* (all trade) allowable and forbidden *ar-ribaa* (all interest)."[61]

Hence, all forms of trade are considered valid unless they have been expressly forbidden. Likewise, in the verse:

﴿ وَٱلسَّارِقُ وَٱلسَّارِقَةُ فَٱقْطَعُوٓاْ أَيْدِيَهُمَا ﴾

"Cut off the hand of *as-saariq was-saariqah* (every male and female thief),"[62]

the Muslim community—and, more specifically, their rulers, who have been delegated the responsibility of establishing justice and legal punishments—would not be in compliance with this order until they cut the hand of **every** male and female thief.

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[59] Genesis 14:18-20.
[60] Hebrews 7:3.
[61] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):275.
[62] *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):38.

3. *An-Nakirah* (the indefinite in a negative or prohibitive construction): Normally, "a" or "an" is put before the Arabic indefinite form when it is translated into English; however, in an expression containing a negation, the indefinite should be translated in such a way as to indicate its generality. For example, the literally translated verse,

﴿ فَلَا رَفَثَ وَلَا فُسُوقَ وَلَا جِدَالَ فِي ٱلْحَجِّ ﴾

> **"So no *rafath* (a vulgar word), *fusooq* (an obscenity), and no *jidaal* (an argument) during hajj"**[63]

should read, **"So there should be no vulgarity, obscenity, or argumentation during hajj."**

Likewise, in the verse,



"And your Lord will not oppress a one (*ahadan*)."[64]

"a one" would be better translated as "anyone."

4. *Allathee* and its Arabic derivatives (the relative pronouns) when acting as subject of the sentence, in which case they would translate as "whoever." An example of this usage can be found in the following verse condemning those who mistreat their parents:

﴿ وَٱلَّذِى قَالَ لِوَٰلِدَيْهِ أُفٍّ لَّكُمَآ ﴾

> **"And whoever (*allathee*) said to his parents, '*Uff* to you both'."**[65]

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[63] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):197.
[64] *Soorah al-Kahf* (18):49.
[65] *Soorah al-Ahqaaf* (46):17.

"Whoever" in this verse is general, *'aam,* and refers to anyone who would speak disrespectfully to his or her parents.

5. *Asmaa' ash-shart* (subordinators which begin conditional clauses: whoever *(man)*, whatever *(maa)*, wherever *(aynamaa)*, whichever *(ayyumaa)*, etc.): All of these expressions convey a generality in English in virtually the same way that they do in Arabic; for example, Allaah's statement in the Qur'aan about Safaa and Marwah, the two hills near the *Ka'bah*:

﴿ فَمَنْ حَجَّ ٱلْبَيْتَ أَوِ ٱعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَن يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا ﴾

"Whoever (*man*) makes hajj or *'umrah* to the House (of Allaah, [i.e. the *Ka'bah*]) may circle them without any blame."[66]

Other examples can be found in the verses,

﴿ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ يَعْلَمْهُ ٱللَّهُ ﴾

"Whatever (*maa*) good you do is known to Allaah,"[67]

and,

﴿ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنتُمْ فَوَلُّوا۟ وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُۥ ﴾

"Wherever you may be, you should turn your faces toward it (the *Ka'bah*)."[68]

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[66] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):158.
[67] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):197.
[68] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):150.

6. *Ismul-jins* (a generic noun in the *mudaaf* [possessive] construction with a definite noun or pronoun): The following verses are examples of this type of generality:

﴿ فَلْيَحْذَرِ ٱلَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِۦٓ ﴾

"Let those who would go against his bidding (*amrihi*) beware."[69]

The generic noun *amr* is related to the possessive pronoun *hi*, making it general. The warning is directed at those who oppose any of the Prophet's instructions. Likewise, the verse,

﴿ يُوصِيكُمُ ٱللَّهُ فِىٓ أَوْلَٰدِكُمْ ﴾

"Allaah advises you concerning your children (*awlaadikum*),"[70]

refers to inheritance laws for all children.

Specification of the *'Aamm*

The *'aamm* expression may be divided into three main categories in relationship to the context of the verses in which they occur and the laws or principles which were intended.[71]

First, there is the *'aamm* expression which remains general. This category does not have many examples because most generalities are specified in one way or another. However, an example can be found in the verse,



"And Allaah knows all (*kull*) things,"[72]

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[69] *Soorah an-Noor* (24):63.
[70] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):11.
[71] See *al-Itqaan*, vol.3, pp. 44-5.

since Allaah's knowledge is absolute. Another example can be found in the verse,

﴿ حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ أُمَّهَٰتُكُمْ ﴾

> **"Your mothers (*ummahaatukum*) have been made forbidden (in marriage) to you,"[73]**

as there are no exceptions to this law, whether they be real mothers, stepmothers, mothers-in-law, or mothers by *ridaa'* (suckling).

Second, there is the figurative *'aam* in which the general meaning of the expression was never intended; for example, the verse,

﴿ ٱلَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّ ٱلنَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُوا۟ لَكُمْ فَٱخْشَوْهُمْ فَزَادَهُمْ إِيمَـٰنًا وَقَالُوا۟ حَسْبُنَا ٱللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ ٱلْوَكِيلُ ١٧٣ ﴾

> **"Those to whom the people (*an-naas*) said, 'The people have gathered against you, so fear them.' "[74]**

The first expression "the people" refers specifically to Nu'aym ibn Mas'ood and the second refers to Aboo Sufyaan and the Qurayshee army, and not the generality which the expression implies.[75]

And third, there is the specified *'aam*, wherein the generality of the *'aam* expression is qualified by one of the specifying words or phrases. For example, Allaah's command in the Qur'aan,

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[72] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):176.
[73] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):23.
[74] *Soorah Aal 'Imraan* (3):173.
[75] *Al-Itqaan*, vol. 3, p. 45.

﴿ وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ حِجُّ ٱلْبَيْتِ مَنِ ٱسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلاً ﴾

"Hajj to the House (the *Ka'bah*) is an obligation to Allaah on all people (*an-naas*) who are able to find a way there."[76]

The generality of "all people" is specified by the adjectival clause following it.

Expressions of *Takhsees*

Takhsees (specification of the general) is accomplished by specifying words or phrases found either within the general statements themselves or outside of them. The five types which occur within general statements are as follows:[77]

1. *Istithnaa* (exception):

In this case the general law is followed by a preposition of exception and a clause or phrase which qualifies it. A good example can be seen in the following verse:

﴿ إِنَّمَا جَزَٰٓؤُاْ ٱلَّذِينَ يُحَارِبُونَ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ وَيَسْعَوْنَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَسَادًا أَن يُقَتَّلُوٓاْ أَوْ يُصَلَّبُوٓاْ أَوْ تُقَطَّعَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُم مِّنْ خِلَٰفٍ أَوْ يُنفَوْاْ مِنَ ٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ لَهُمْ خِزْىٌ فِى ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ وَلَهُمْ فِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٣٣﴾ إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ تَابُواْ مِن قَبْلِ أَن تَقْدِرُواْ عَلَيْهِمْ ۖ فَٱعْلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٣٤﴾ ﴾

[76] *Soorah Aal 'Imraan* (3):97.
[77] *Al-Itqaan*, vol. 3, pp. 46-7.

“Verily, for those who (*allatheena*) wage war against Allaah and His Messenger and spread corruption in the land, the penalty is execution, crucifixion, severing opposite hands and legs, or banishment from the land. That is their disgrace in this life, and in the next life they will receive a severe punishment, except those who repent before they are caught.”[78]

2. *Sifah* (modification):

This type refers mainly to relative clauses introduced by the relative pronouns *allathee, allatee* (who, which), and their derivatives. An example of this type of specification can be found in the following verse concerning the forbidden categories of marriage:

﴿ وَرَبَٰٓئِبُكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِى فِى حُجُورِكُم مِّن نِّسَآئِكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِى دَخَلْتُم بِهِنَّ ﴾

“And your stepdaughters (*rabaa’ibukum*) under your care, born of your wives whom (*allaatee*) you have entered.”[79]

That is, a man’s stepdaughter by a wife with whom he had sexual intercourse is forbidden to him if he divorces his wife or if she dies. However, if he divorced her before consummating the marriage or if she died before he did so, he would be able to marry her daughter (his stepdaughter). Thus, the relative clause, “whom you have entered” specifies the general phrase, “step-daughters of your wives.”

3. *Shart* (condition):

Conditional clauses function as specifiers since they state the dependence of one circumstance or set of circumstances on another. Such clauses are usually introduced by a subordinator such as “*in*” (if). For example, the verse,

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[78] *Soorah al-Maa’idah* (5):33-4.
[79] *Soorah an-Nisaa’* (4):23.

﴿ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ ٱلْمَوْتُ إِن تَرَكَ خَيْرًا ٱلْوَصِيَّةُ لِلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۖ حَقًّا عَلَى ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٨٠﴾ ﴾

"It is prescribed upon you that you bequeath a good portion (of your wealth) for your parents and close relations when death approaches any of you (*a<u>h</u>adakum*), if *(in)* you have left some wealth; an obligation on those who fear God."[80]

Thus the general obligation of writing a will when death approaches is turned into an obligation only for those who possess wealth.

4. *Ghaayah* (clauses of time):

Adverbial clauses of time are usually introduced by the subordinator "*<u>h</u>attaa*" (until) and accompanied by a negative. Good examples of this type of specification are Allaah's statements concerning the rites of <u>h</u>ajj,

﴿ وَلَا تَحْلِقُوا رُءُوسَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ ٱلْهَدْىُ مَحِلَّهُۥ ﴾

"Do not shave your heads until (*hattaa*) your sacrificial animal has reached its appointed place (of sacrifice),"[81]

and His statement concerning menstruating women,

﴿ وَلَا تَقْرَبُوهُنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَطْهُرْنَ ﴾

"Do not come near them (for sexual intercourse) until (*<u>h</u>attaa*) they have reached a state of purity."[82]

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[80] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):180.
[81] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):196.
[82] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):222.

5. *Badal al-ba'd minal-kull* (substitution of a part for the whole): This is an Arabic construction in which a form of relative clause introduced by the subordinator "whoever" (*man*) des-cribes an aspect of a noun which it can take the place of. An example of this type of construction can be seen in a literal translation of the verse,

﴿ وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ حِجُّ ٱلْبَيْتِ مَنِ ٱسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلاً ﴾

"Allaah has a right on all people (*an-naas*) to make hajj to the House; whoever (*man*) is able to find a way there."[83]

In Arabic, the subordinator "whoever" represents a part of the phrase "all people" and is substituted in its place. Hence the verse could be translated, **"Allaah has a right on whoever is able to find a way that they make *hajj* to the House (*Ka'bah*)."**

Takhsees of a verse by an external statement

As was previously mentioned, the other type of *takhsees* occurs outside of the general statement which it qualifies. The following are the most common ways in which specification may take place outside of the general verse:[84]

1. Qur'aan:

A general Qur'aanic statement may become specified by another verse found elsewhere in the Qur'aan. A good example of this type of qualification can be seen in the following case:

﴿ وَٱلْمُطَلَّقَـٰتُ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَـٰثَةَ قُرُوٓءٍ ﴾

"Divorced women (*al-mutallaqaat*) should wait for three menstrual periods."[85]

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[83] *Soorah Aal 'Imraan* (3):97.
[84] See *al-Itqaan*, vol. 3, pp. 47-8.
[85] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):228.

This statement includes all categories of divorced women, whether they are pregnant or not and whether the marriage was consummated or not. However, this generality was qualified by the following verses,

﴿ وَأُوْلَٰتُ ٱلْأَحْمَالِ أَجَلُهُنَّ أَن يَضَعْنَ حَمْلَهُنَّ ﴾

"The waiting period for pregnant women is until they deliver,"[86]

and,

﴿ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا نَكَحْتُمُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ ثُمَّ طَلَّقْتُمُوهُنَّ مِن قَبْلِ أَن تَمَسُّوهُنَّ فَمَا لَكُمْ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ عِدَّةٍ تَعْتَدُّونَهَا ﴾

"O you who believe, if you marry believing women, then divorce them before touching them (consum-mation), you have no right on them for an *'iddah.*"[87]

That is, the waiting period for pregnant divorced women may be as long as nine months, while the divorced woman of an unconsummated marriage has no *'iddah* at all. Thus the verse is specifically in reference to divorced women who are not pregnant and whose marriages were consummated.

2. *Sunnah:*

General statements in the Qur'aan may also be qualified by statements (*hadeeths*) of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). A significant part of the Prophet's role was that of explaining the generalities of the Qur'aan. For example, the general verse which has been previously mentioned,

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[86] *Soorah at-Talaaq* (65):4.

[87] *Soorah al-Ahzaab* (33):49.

﴿ وَأَحَلَّ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ ٱلرِّبَوٰاْ ﴾

"Allaah has made all trade allowable and forbidden all forms of interest,"[88]

refers only to correct forms of trade. Statements from the *Sunnah* have excluded certain categories of trade and classified them as being corrupt. Ibn 'Umar reported that Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) forbade trade in "the semen of male animals"[89] and also forbade the sale of "a pregnant animal's progeny before its delivery."[90] Ibn 'Umar explained that in pre-Islaamic times a man would sell the offspring of a she-camel not yet born of an existing she-camel.

There are a few cases wherein *hadeeths* of the Prophet (ﷺ) have been made specific by verses of the Qur'aan. A good example of this type of *takhsees* is the *hadeeth* narrated by the *sahaabee* Aboo Waaqid al-Laythee, who reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

(مَا قُطِعَ مِنْ بَهِيمَةٍ وَهِيَ حَيَّةٌ فَهُوَ مَيْتَةٌ .)

"*Whatever* (maa) *is cut off of a living animal is considered carrion.*"[91]

The general meaning of this statement would require that even wool or hair removed from a live animal be forbidden to Muslims. However, Allaah revealed the following verse which qualifies the Prophet's statement,



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[88] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):275.

[89] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 3, p. 267, no. 484.

[90] Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 3, p. 199, no. 353) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 798, no. 3615).

[91] Collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 2, p. 803, no. 2852), Ibn Maajah and ad-Daarimee and authenticated by al-Albanee in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 2, p. 552, no. 2485.

“And from their wool, fur, and hair (Allaah made for you) luxuries and useful articles (to serve you) for a time.”[92]

MUṮLAQ (ABSOLUTE) AND *MUQAYYAD* (QUALIFIED)

This pair of concepts is similar to the paired concepts, *‘aamm* and *khaas̲s̲*. A major difference is that the word which is *‘aamm* encompasses every member of the category it names, whereas the *muṯlaq* word usually applies to any one of a multitude, but not to all.[93] For instance, if I say to a servant, “Give ten dollars to every high school graduate who comes to the house,” this expression is *‘aamm*. The servant would not be in compliance with my command unless he gives ten dollars to every individual who meets those qualifications. On the other hand, if I told him, “Give ten dollars to a *(miskeen)* poor person,”[94] this expression is *muṯlaq*. He would be in compliance if he gave it to a single individual who is poor.

The *muṯlaq* may be defined as a word or phrase which expresses a non-figurative idea without placing any limitations on it. It refers to one type of thing without being specific and usually occurs in the form of an indefinite noun *(an-nakirah)* in an affirmative statement. Terms like “a slave,” “a chair,” or “a dog” would be *muṯlaq,* whereas “a believing slave,” “a metal chair,” or “a Filipino man” would all be *muqayyad,* because each indefinite noun has been qualified and restricted by an adjective *(s̲ifah)*.

Allaah states in the Qur’aan that the expiation for breaking oaths in God’s name is either,

﴿ إِطْعَامُ عَشَرَةِ مَسَـٰكِينَ مِنْ أَوْسَطِ مَا تُطْعِمُونَ أَهْلِيكُمْ أَوْ كِسْوَتُهُمْ أَوْ تَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ ﴾

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[92] *Soorah an-Naẖl* (16):80.

[93] See *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 113. This is based on a definition of the *muṯlaq* given by many *‘usool* scholars, such as Ibn Qudaamah and al-Aamidee. The definition has been criticized by other scholars, such as as-Subkee. See *Kashf al-Asraar*, vol. 2, p. 520.

[94] An English speaker might say that a qualification has occurred in this statement, because “poor” is an adjective qualifying the noun “person.” However, in Arabic there is a single noun, *miskeen*, for this concept.

> **“....the feeding or clothing of ten poor persons according to how you feed and clothe your own family or the freeing of a slave.”**[95]

There are no limitations as to what type of slave may be freed. However, the type of slave has been restricted in the following verse:

﴿ وَمَن قَتَلَ مُؤۡمِنًا خَطَـًٔا فَتَحۡرِيرُ رَقَبَةٖ مُّؤۡمِنَةٖ وَدِيَةٞ مُّسَلَّمَةٌ إِلَىٰٓ أَهۡلِهِۦٓ ﴾

> **“And whoever kills a believer accidentally should free a believing slave and pay a *deeyah* (fine) to the family.”**[96]

One of the issues discussed by the scholars of *usool al-fiqh* is the permissibly of applying a *muqayyad* expression from one text of the Qur’aan or *Sunnah* to a *mutlaq* expression in another text. There are certain circumstances in which there is consensus of the permissibility of this deductive tool, and there are other circumstances where scholars agree it is not allowed to do so, and there are circumstances in which there is some difference of opinion. In order to clarify the issue, the *mutlaq* and *muqayyad* verses have been placed in four main categories in relation to the underlying reason (*sabab*) for their revelation and the agreement or disagreement of the rules (*hukm*) which they contain.

1. Same *sabaab* and *hukm:*

An example is the fourth option in atoning (*kaffaarah*) for breaking an oath taken in Allaah’s name, i.e., to fast three days. This principle is *mutlaq* in the Qur’aan as follows:

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[95] *Soorah al-Maa’idah* (5):89.
[96] *Soorah an-Nisaa’* (4):92.

﴿ فَمَن لَّمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ ثَلَٰثَةِ أَيَّامٍۚ ذَٰلِكَ كَفَّٰرَةُ أَيْمَٰنِكُمْ إِذَا حَلَفْتُمْ ﴾

> **"And whoever is unable (to do the previous three options) should fast three days; that is the atonement for breaking your oaths after taking them."**[97]

However, in the recitation of Ibn Mas'ood, it was *muqayyad:*

(فَصِيَامُ ثَلاَثَةِ أَيَّامٍ مُتَتَابِعَاتٍ)

"Fast three <u>consecutive</u> days."

Thus, some scholars ruled that since the *sabab* (breaking an oath taken in Allaah's name) was the same in both recitations, and the *<u>h</u>ukm* (fasting) was the same, the *mu<u>t</u>laq* rule should be understood according to the *muqayyad* recitation. There is general agreement about the validity of applying the *muqayyad* text to the *mu<u>t</u>laq* text in this category, as long as both texts are authentic.

A similar case where most scholars agree on the validity of applying the *muqayyad* to the *mu<u>t</u>laq* is the prohibition of eating blood. In several verses of the Qur'aan, blood is prohibited with a *mu<u>t</u>laq* expression:

﴿ إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱلْمَيْتَةَ وَٱلدَّمَ ﴾

"He only prohibited for you carrion and blood..."[98]

However, in verse 145 of *Soorah al-An'aam*, Allaah says,

﴿ قُل لَّآ أَجِدُ فِي مَآ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ مُحَرَّمًا عَلَىٰ طَاعِمٍ يَطْعَمُهُۥٓ إِلَّآ أَن يَكُونَ مَيْتَةً أَوْ دَمًا مَّسْفُوحًا ... ﴾

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[97] *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):89.
[98] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):173.

"Say (O Prophet ﷺ), 'In all that has been revealed to me, I do not find anything forbidden to eat, if one wants to eat of it, unless it is carrion or blood poured forth...' "

Since the *mutlaq* and the *muqayyad* both deal with prohibited foods, it is valid to say that the only type of prohibited blood is that which is poured forth. Therefore, the blood that seeps from meat while it is being cooked is not prohibited.[99]

2. Same *sabab* but different *hukm:*

An example of this category is the case of cleaning the hands[100] during the performance of *wudoo'* and *tayammum.*[101] In the verse on purification,

﴿ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا قُمۡتُمۡ إِلَى ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ فَٱغۡسِلُواْ وُجُوهَكُمۡ وَأَيۡدِيَكُمۡ إِلَى ٱلۡمَرَافِقِ ﴾

"O believers, when you get up to make *salaah* (prayer), you should wash your faces and hands up to the elbows."[102]

the word "hands" in making *wudoo'* is *muqayyad;* whereas in the same verse concerning *tayammum,* it is left *mutlaq:*[103]

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[99] See *Kashf al-Asraar*, vol. 2, p. 527.

[100] Hand (*yad*) in Arabic could refer to the palm up to the wrist, up to the elbow, or up to the shoulder.

[101] Purification with dust or clean earth in the absence of water.

[102] *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):6.

[103] A person may ask, "Why is this verse considered *muqayyad* rather than *mukhassas*? Isn't it true that one of the forms for expressing the *'aamm* in Arabic is the generic noun related to a possessive pronoun?" However, one should keep in mind that one of the conditions of the *'aamm* is that it applies to many things, not limited in number. Each human being has two hands, which is a limited number.

﴿ فَتَيَمَّمُواْ صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَٱمۡسَحُواْ بِوُجُوهِكُمۡ وَأَيۡدِيكُم مِّنۡهُ ﴾

"Make *tayammum* with good (clean) earth; Wipe your faces and hands with it."[104]

In these examples, the *sabab* (loss of one's state of purity) is the same in both cases; however, the *hukm* is different in that water is used in the case of *wudoo'* and more body parts are cleaned; whereas dust is used only on the face and hands in the case of *tayammum.* Hence, the *mutlaq* should not be interpreted according to the *muqayyad.* In fact, authentic *hadeeths* describing *tayammum* specify the wrists as the limit. The *sahaabee* 'Ammaar ibn Yaasir reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) told him to strike both of his hands on the ground once, blow on them, and then wipe his face and hands, left hand on right, up to the wrists.[105]

3. Different *sabab* but same *hukm:*

The atonement (*kaffaarah*) of freeing a slave is a good example of this category. In the case of accidental murder, the word slave is *muqayyad:*

﴿ وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤۡمِنٍ أَن يَقۡتُلَ مُؤۡمِنًا إِلَّا خَطَـٔٗاۚ وَمَن قَتَلَ مُؤۡمِنًا خَطَـٔٗا فَتَحۡرِيرُ رَقَبَةٖ مُّؤۡمِنَةٖ وَدِيَةٞ مُّسَلَّمَةٌ إِلَىٰٓ أَهۡلِهِۦٓ ﴾

"A believer may not kill another believer except by accident. And whoever kills a believer accidentally should free a believing slave."[106]

But in the case of *thihaar*[107] the word is *mutlaq:*

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[104] *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):6.
[105] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, pp. 208-9, no. 343, and *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 202, nos. 716-8.
[106] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):92.
[107] A quasi-divorce practiced by pre-Islaamic Arabs. The husband would swear not to touch his wife because he considered her "like his mother." The wife was not free to look for another husband, but she was denied conjugal rights.

﴿ وَٱلَّذِينَ يُظَـٰهِرُونَ مِن نِّسَآئِهِمْ ثُمَّ يَعُودُونَ لِمَا قَالُوا۟ فَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ مِّن قَبْلِ أَن يَتَمَآسَّا ﴾

"Those who swear off their wives, then wish to go back on what they said, should free a slave before they touch each other."[108]

There is obviously no basis here for interpreting the *mutlaq* according to the *muqayyad.* A believer's life was taken, hence the requirement is that the freed slave be a believer; whereas in the case of breaking of oaths made by *thihaar* or otherwise, the freeing of any slave is sufficient.

4. Different *sabab* and different *hukm:*

An example of this category is in the case of the hand in *wudoo'* and theft. In the verse on purification previously mentioned, the hand is made *muqayyad* by the phrase, "**up to the elbows,"** but in the case of theft, it is left *mutlaq*. Consider the following:

﴿ وَٱلسَّارِقُ وَٱلسَّارِقَةُ فَٱقْطَعُوٓا۟ أَيْدِيَهُمَا ﴾

"Cut off the hands of both the male and female thief."[109]

Here again, the *mutlaq* cannot be specified by the *muqayyad,* especially since it was reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) limited the amputation of hands to the wrist and so did the Righteous Caliphs.[110]

MANTOOQ (STATED) AND *MAFHOOM* (IMPLIED) MEANINGS

Words and expressions may convey ideas either by their explicit constructions or by implication. Meaning derived from the explicit aspect of

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[108] *Soorah al-Mujaadalah* (58):3.
[109] *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):38.
[110] See *Kashf al-Asraar*, vol. 2, pp. 521-7.

words or expressions are referred to as *mantooq,* while those derived from their implications are called *mafhoom.*

Mantooq (explicit) meanings may be derived in five different ways, depending on the type of Arabic grammatical construction used.

1. *Nass* (explicit):

This method of deriving the *mantooq* meaning refers to any expression which clearly indicates an idea, leaving no room for other interpretations; for example, the following verse orders those who intend *hajj tamattu‘*, but are unable to slaughter an animal:

﴿ فَصِيَامُ ثَلَٰثَةِ أَيَّامٍ فِي ٱلْحَجِّ وَسَبْعَةٍ إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ ۗ تِلْكَ عَشَرَةٌ كَامِلَةٌ ﴾

“You should fast three days during hajj and seven days when you return (home); those make a complete (*kaamilah*) ten (days).”[111]

The adjective (*sifah*) “complete” removes any doubt that ten meant approximately ten, according to figurative usage.

2. *Thaahir* (obvious):

This term refers to the most obvious and likely meaning of a given expression which could indicate another, though less likely, meaning. An example of the *thaahir* can be found in the verse referring to the consumption of forbidden meats:

﴿ فَمَنِ ٱضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَآ إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ ﴾

“But whoever is forced to eat it without willful disobedience (*baaghin*) or transgressing the limits has no sin on him.”[112]

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[111] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):196.

The term “*baaghin*” could also mean “ignorant,” but in this context the meaning “willfully disobedient” is more obviously suited. Another example of this type of expression is the verse concerning sexual relations with menstruating women:

﴿ وَلَا تَقْرَبُوهُنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَطْهُرْنَ ﴾

“And do not come near them (menstruating women) until they have become pure (*yat-hurna*).”[113]

“*Yat-hurna*” could mean either the end of the menstrual cycle, making *wudoo*’[114] or taking a *ghusl.*[115] However, the likelihood of it meaning a *ghusl* is greater than the other possible meanings.

3. *Mu’awwal* (explained):

In this case, the obvious meaning of an expression is avoided due to its inappropriateness. That is, the less obvious meaning of the expression is favored due to some factor(s) which disallow the obvious meaning. For example, Allaah commands us in our relations with parents as follows:

﴿ وَٱخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ ٱلذُّلِّ مِنَ ٱلرَّحْمَةِ ﴾

“Lower the wing (*janaah*) of humility out of mercy to them.”[116]

The phrase “wing of humility” is taken to mean submissiveness, obedience to parents, and good treatment of parents, due to the impossibility of human beings having wings.

Another example is in verse 6 of *Soorah al-Maa’idah:*

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[112] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):173.
[113] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):222.
[114] Washing the face, hands and feet and wiping the hair.
[115] A complete bath.
[116] *Soorah al-Israa’* (17):24.

﴿ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِذَا قُمۡتُمۡ إِلَى ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ فَٱغۡسِلُواْ وُجُوهَكُمۡ ... ﴾

"O you who believe, when you stand to pray, wash your faces..."

The apparent meaning of the verse is that one must perform *wudoo'* after one stands to perform salaah. Since there is no record of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions making a habit of performing *wudoo'* after the *iqaamah* was called, the scholars agree that the intended meaning is that one must perform *wudoo'* when one intends to pray, and then only if one has lost his previous *wudoo'*. The second point is disputed by the Thaahiree school, who adhere to the literal implication of the verse. The majority of scholars argue against them on the basis of the *hadeeth* of Sulaymaan ibn Buraydah that the Prophet (ﷺ) prayed all the prayers with a single *wudoo'* on the day of his victorious reentry into Makkah. When 'Umar asked him about it, remarking that he had never seen him do so before, the Prophet (ﷺ) told him,

(عَمْدًا صَنَعْتُهُ ، يَا عُمَرُ .)

"I did so on purpose, 'Umar."[117]

4. *Iqtidaa* (necessity):

Sometimes the correct meaning of an Arabic expression depends on the supposition of a deleted word or phrase. Such a method of derivation of a *mantooq* meaning is called "*dalaalah al-iqtidaa*;" that is, indication of the meaning by a necessary supposition.[118] A classical example of this type can be found in the verse on fasting:

﴿ فَمَن كَانَ مِنكُم مَّرِيضًا أَوۡ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٖ فَعِدَّةٞ مِّنۡ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ ﴾

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[117] *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 165-6, no. 540.

[118] See *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, pp. 128-30.

"Whoever among you who is sick or travelling (should fast) a (like) number of other days."[119]

The phrase, *"fa afṯara"* ("and breaks fast"), has to be supposed after "travelling," because a traveller is only required to make up days of fasting if he or she breaks fast while travelling. Likewise, one who is sick but does not break his or her fast would have no fasts to make up.[120]

5. *Ishaarah* (suggestion):

At other times, an expression may indicate a secondary meaning without requiring any supposition of words or phrases. This type of *manṯooq* meaning is called *"dilaalah al-ishaarah;"* that is, indication of the meaning by suggestion. If one considers, for example, the verse:

﴿ أُحِلَّ لَكُمۡ لَيۡلَةَ ٱلصِّيَامِ ٱلرَّفَثُ إِلَىٰ نِسَآئِكُمۡۚ هُنَّ لِبَاسٞ لَّكُمۡ
وَأَنتُمۡ لِبَاسٞ لَّهُنَّۗ عَلِمَ ٱللَّهُ أَنَّكُمۡ كُنتُمۡ تَخۡتَانُونَ أَنفُسَكُمۡ
فَتَابَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَعَفَا عَنكُمۡۖ فَٱلۡـَٰٔنَ بَٰشِرُوهُنَّ وَٱبۡتَغُواْ مَا كَتَبَ ٱللَّهُ
لَكُمۡۚ وَكُلُواْ وَٱشۡرَبُواْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ ٱلۡخَيۡطُ ٱلۡأَبۡيَضُ مِنَ ٱلۡخَيۡطِ
ٱلۡأَسۡوَدِ مِنَ ٱلۡفَجۡرِ ﴾

"Intercourse with your wives is permitted for you during the nights of the (month of fasting...so go to them and seek what Allaah has written

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[119] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):184.
[120] This is the position of the four *math-habs*. They were opposed by the Thaahirees.

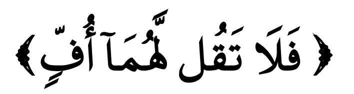
for you; and eat and drink until the white thread of the dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread (of the night).”[121]

This indicates that it is acceptable to begin the fast in a state of *janaabah,*[122] since intercourse is allowable at night up until dawn, possibly leaving no opportunity for one to regain his or her state of purity by bathing; thus, entering the morning of a fast in a state of impurity must, of necessity, be allowable.

Mafhoom (Implied) Meanings

There are two types of *mafhoom* (implied) meanings in relationship to the rule contained in the *mantooq* meaning of a statement: the *mafhoom al-muwaafaqah,* in which the rule in the implied meaning agrees with that of the *mantooq;* and *mafhoom al-mukhaalafah,* in which the rule in the implied meaning is the contrapositive of the *mantooq.*[123] That is, if a law is connected to a particular condition, trait, number, etc., one can assume the law doesn't apply when the condition, trait, number, etc. is missing. Both of these types of *mafhoom* meanings have been further subdivided by some scholars; however, the differences are so linguistically fine that it will suffice to mention a few examples from each of the two main types here.

An example of *mafhoom al-muwaafaqah* can be found in the verse prohibiting harsh words with parents,



“Do not say to them ‘*Uff.*’”[124]

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[121] *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):187.

[122] A state of impurity caused by sexual intercourse. It is removed by a *ghusl* (Islaamic bath).

[123] See *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, pp. 132-7.

[124] “*Uff*” literally means dirt in the ears or under the fingernails, but is used as an interjection expressing displeasure. The verse is from *Soorah al-Israa'* (17):23.

The *mantooq* here forbids the saying of "*Uff*" to parents, and the *mafhoom* is that cursing them or hitting them is also forbidden. Another example may be found in the verse on the property of orphans:

﴿ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَأۡكُلُونَ أَمۡوَٰلَ ٱلۡيَتَٰمَىٰ ظُلۡمًا إِنَّمَا يَأۡكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمۡ نَارٗاۖ وَسَيَصۡلَوۡنَ سَعِيرٗا ١٠ ﴾

"Verily, those who consume the wealth of orphans unjustly only consume fire in their stomachs, and they will soon be burnt in a blazing Fire."[125]

The *mantooq* prohibits misappropriating the property of an orphan for one's personal benefit. By implication, it would also be prohibited to burn an orphan's money, as both acts deprive the orphan of benefit from his wealth. In the example of mistreatment of parents, the rule in the *mafhoom* is stronger than that of the *mantooq;* while in the second example, they are on the same level.

The validity of rules derived from the *mafhoom al-muwaafaqah* is unquestionably logical and, as such, it is among the fundamental principles used by all of the scholars of Islaamic law.[126]

Scholars are divided, however, on the validity of arguments based on *mafhoom al-mukhaalafah.* An example of it is contained in the verse,

﴿ إِن جَآءَكُمۡ فَاسِقُۢ بِنَبَإٖ فَتَبَيَّنُوٓاْ ﴾

"If a sinful person comes to you with information, get it confirmed."[127]

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[125] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):10.

[126] It is also called *al-qiyaas al-jalee,* the obvious analogy.

This verse implies that information brought by a righteous person should be accepted without the necessity of confirmation. Another example is contained in the verse on the punishment for one who slanders a woman by falsely accusing her of fornication or adultery:

﴿ فَٱجۡلِدُوهُمۡ ثَمَٰنِينَ جَلۡدَةٗ ﴾

"Lash them eighty times."[128]

The *mafhoom* here is that they should be given no more nor less than eighty lashes. Also, in the verse concerning hunting during *hajj,*

﴿ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَقۡتُلُواْ ٱلصَّيۡدَ وَأَنتُمۡ حُرُمٞۚ وَمَن قَتَلَهُۥ مِنكُم مُّتَعَمِّدٗا فَجَزَآءٞ مِّثۡلُ مَا قَتَلَ مِنَ ٱلنَّعَمِ ﴾

"O Believers, do not hunt while you are in a state of *ihraam.*[129] The punishment for whoever intentionally kills (an animal) is the sacrifice of a like domesticated animal,"[130]

the *mafhoom* meaning here is that the accidental killing of an animal does not necessitate a sacrifice. In each of the preceding cases, the *mafhoom al-mukhaalafah* yields a valid ruling. However, where the *mantooq* is a description of a common circumstance which is not true in all cases, the *mafhoom al-mukhaalafah* will be false. For example, in the verse prohibiting marriage to stepdaughters,

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[127] *Soorah al-Hujuraat* (49):6.

[128] *Soorah an-Noor* (24):4.

[129] A state of consecration one enters for hajj or *'umrah,* in which one refrains from sex, cutting of the hair, wearing perfume, etc., and in the case of men, regular clothing is replaced by two sheet-like garments.

[130] *Soorah al-Maa'idah* (5):95.

﴿ وَرَبَٰٓئِبُكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِي فِي حُجُورِكُم ﴾

"And your stepdaughters under your care,"[131]

the *mafhoom al-mukhaalafah* is that stepdaughters not under your care may be taken in marriage. However, this is not the case. The phrase "under your care" only addresses the usual situation and not a condition of prohibition. This interpretation, agreed upon between the four *math-habs*, is strengthened by the fact that the verse mentions two qualifications for the step-daughters:

﴿ وَرَبَٰٓئِبُكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِي فِي حُجُورِكُم مِّن نِّسَآئِكُمُ ٱلَّٰتِي دَخَلۡتُم بِهِنَّ فَإِن لَّمۡ تَكُونُواْ دَخَلۡتُم بِهِنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيۡكُمۡ ﴾

> **"And your stepdaughters under your care (born) of your wives with whom you have consummated marriage—but if you have not gone into them, then there is no sin for you (to marry their daughters after the death or divorce of the mothers)..."**[132]

It then goes on to explicitly state that if the second condition does not hold, the prohibition doesn't apply. It makes no mention of this exception when the first condition is missing.

The other case of an incorrect *mafhoom al-mukhaalafah* is when the *mantooq* is an explanation of a certain reality. For example, the verse,

﴿ وَمَن يَدۡعُ مَعَ ٱللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا ءَاخَرَ لَا بُرۡهَٰنَ لَهُۥ بِهِۦ فَإِنَّمَا حِسَابُهُۥ عِندَ رَبِّهِۦٓۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُفۡلِحُ ٱلۡكَٰفِرُونَ ١١٧ ﴾

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[131] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):23.
[132] *Soorah an-Nisaa'* (4):23.

> **"And whoever worships another god along with Allaah with no proof of it (being real), his account is only with his Lord. Verily, the rejecters of faith will not prosper."**[133]

The *mafhoom* of the verse is that if someone has proof of another god's reality, he may worship it along with Allaah. This is incorrect, because there is no valid proof of any other god's reality, since no other god exists besides Allaah. The phrase "with no proof of it being real" was added for emphasis and to ridicule those who worship other gods (idols) besides Allaah. Hence, the majority of scholars accept the rules derived from the *mafhoom al-mukhaalafah* as long as the conditions of the *mantooq* are not descriptions of a common circumstance or an explanation of reality.[134]

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[133] *Soorah al-Mu'minoon* (23):117.

[134] Aboo Haneefah alone rejected the use of *mafhoom al-mukhaalafah.*

CONCLUSION

I have attempted in this book to acquaint the English-speaking reader with some of the sciences of the Qur'aan. The more one understands of the Qur'aan and applies in one's life, the closer one comes to Allaah. I hope that Muslims will steer the middle course between two unpleasant extremes. The first is to throw up one's hands, claiming that Islaamic knowledge is not the business of the layperson, and that it should be left to specialists in the field. This attitude has left the Muslim masses in deep ignorance of their religion. Whoever is not busy learning about Islaam is likely to be busy in a wide variety of activities that will be a cause for regret on the Day of Judgment. This attitude also leads to a result that was severely criticized in *Soorah at-Tawbah.* The Jews and Christians took their priests and rabbis as lords in place of God by blindly following them when they prohibited what God had made lawful for them and made lawful that which God had prohibited.[135]

The second extreme is to consider oneself learned after having read a couple of books on Islaam. Such persons feel duty-bound to correct the "mistakes" of those around them when they see them doing something they are unfamiliar with, or when they have heard somebody somewhere say that a certain practice is wrong, but they themselves have not studied the different positions of scholars on the issue along with their evidences. I hope that this book will impress upon such people the complexity of the Islaamic sciences, especially since that which has been presented here is the tiniest tip of an iceberg compared to what has been written on the subject in Arabic.

I would hope that if the reader gets nothing else out of the book, that he or she will leave with a standard by which to measure the statements of those who are offering interpretations of the Qur'aan. We live in a time when non-Muslims are very eager for the Muslims to reinterpret the sources of our *deen.* Fundamental to such efforts is reinterpretation of the Qur'aan. Muslims are fairly wary of non-Muslim reinterpretations, but there is a whole reinterpretation movement being advocated by Muslims. This movement, which is especially strong among Muslims living or trained in the West, takes many assumptions of western industrial civilization as self-evident truths which must be accommodated in the Muslims' understanding and practice of Islaam.

[135] *Soorah at-Tawbah* (9):31.

One of the main methods of this movement is that a position on a given issue is taken, then evidence is sought to support it. One of their favorite tactics is to argue on the basis of a particular verse on an issue, often according to their own new interpretation, while ignoring other verses which make their interpretation impossible. A classic example of this is the distorted *tafseer* of verse 62 of *Soorah al-Baqarah:*

﴿ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَٱلَّذِينَ هَادُوا۟ وَٱلنَّصَـٰرَىٰ وَٱلصَّـٰبِـِٔينَ مَنْ
ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْـَٔاخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَـٰلِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ
وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾ ﴾

"Verily, those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans—whoever believes in Allaah and the Last Day and does right—they will have their reward with their Lord and there will be no fear upon them neither will they grieve."

They say this verse is clear proof that Jews and Christians are believers, that we are all brothers and that the only criteria for entry into paradise are belief in Allaah and the Day of Judgment along with good deeds. However, Muslim scholars throughout history have interpreted this verse in light of verses 150-1 of *Soorah an-Nisaa'*:

﴿ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِٱللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن يُفَرِّقُوا۟ بَيْنَ ٱللَّهِ
وَرُسُلِهِۦ وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ بِبَعْضٍ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَن يَتَّخِذُوا۟
بَيْنَ ذَٰلِكَ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٥٠﴾ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْكَـٰفِرُونَ حَقًّا ۚ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَـٰفِرِينَ
عَذَابًا مُّهِينًا ﴿١٥١﴾ ﴾

“Verily, those who disbelieve in Allaah and His messengers and want to make a distinction between Allaah and His messengers, and who say, ‘We believe in some and disbelieve in others,’ and want to pursue a path in-between—they are truly disbelievers; and I have prepared a humiliating torment for the disbe-lievers.”

This passage clearly refers to the Jews, who deny that Jesus and Mu<u>h</u>ammad (peace be upon them both) were prophets, and the Christians, who deny Mu<u>h</u>ammad’s prophethood.[136]

How then could Jews and Christians who heard about Mu<u>h</u>ammad (ﷺ) and rejected his prophethood be promised that they would get a reward and have nothing to fear? A person who interprets the verse from *Soorah al-Baqarah* in that way has taken a position that requires the Qur’aan to contradict itself, which is in itself a position of disbelief. Therefore, the consensus of Muslim scholars is that there are two valid possible interpretations of the verse. The first is that Jews at the time of Moses and Christians at the time of Jesus who believed in Allaah and followed the prophet sent to them have been promised this reward. The other is that after the mission of Prophet Mu<u>h</u>ammad (ﷺ), the stated reward is for those among the various religious groups who believe in Allaah and the Last Day and do good as defined in the final revelation, having believed in Mu<u>h</u>ammad (ﷺ) as a prophet sent to them.[137] These two interpretations take into account all of the evidence (of which only a fraction has been mentioned for the sake of brevity), while the first does not.

Another common technique to be wary of is *tafseer* of the Qur’aan solely on the basis of linguistic meanings of the words. For such *tafseers* to sound plausible, the *Sunnah* must be ignored. You see some of them rejecting a *<u>h</u>adeeth* because it was only reported by a handful of *<u>s</u>a<u>h</u>aabah!* This methodology has been a common feature of deviant pseudo-Islaamic groups throughout history. Hopefully, the reader, after finishing this book, will be able to recognize the flaws in such agenda-driven reinterpretations. I ask Allaah to guide all of us to that which pleases Him and to save us from ruin in the hereafter.

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[136] See *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*, vol. 1, p. 585, *al-Jaami‘ li A<u>h</u>kaam al-Qur’aan*, vol. 6, pp. 5-6, and *Tafseer a<u>t</u>-<u>T</u>abaree*, vol. 4, pp. 343-4.

[137] See *Tafseer Ibn Katheer*, vol. 1, pp. 107-8, *al-Jaami‘ li A<u>h</u>kaam al-Qur’aan*, vol.1, pp. 295-6, *Tafseer a<u>t</u>-<u>T</u>abaree*, vol. 1, pp. 361-5 and *Roo<u>h</u> al-Ma‘aanee*, vol. 1, p. 280.

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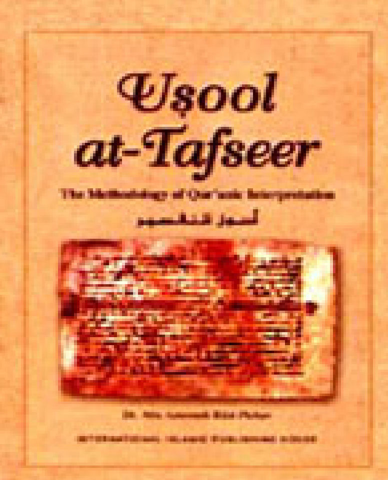
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